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GATEWAYS TO LITERATURE

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GATEWAYS TO LITERATURE

AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

BRANDER MATTHEWS

PROFESSOR IN COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
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OF ARTS AND LETTERS

NEW YORK
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TO THE MEMORY OF
FRANCIS DAVIS MILLET

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GATEWAYS TO LITERATURE

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[This address was delivered at Columbia University on October 13, 1909, as the first of a series of Lectures on Literature.]

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I

GATEWAYS TO LITERATURE

I

TWO winters ago Columbia University invited its teaching staff, its students and its friends to a series of lectures which set forth the essential quality and the existing condition of each of the several sciences; and today Columbia University begins another series of lectures devoted to a single one of the arts,—the art of Literature. In the opening decade of this twentieth century, when the triumphs of Science are exultant on all sides of us, there would be a lack of propriety in failing to acknowledge its power and its authority; and a grosser failure would follow any attempt to set up Art as a rival over against Science. Art and Science have each of them their own field; they have each of them their own work to do; and they are not competitors but colleags in the service of humanity, responding to different needs. Man cannot live by Science alone, since Science does not feed the soul; and it is Art which nourishes the heart of man. Sci-

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ence does what it can; and Art does what it must. Science takes no thought of the individual; and individuality is the essence of Art. Science seeks to be impersonal and it is ever struggling to cast out what it calls the personal equation. Art cherishes individuality and is what it is because of the differences which distinguish one man from another, and therefore the loftiest achievements of art are the result of the personal equation raised to its highest power.

Of all the liberal arts Literature is the oldest, as it is the most immediate in its utility and the broadest in its appeal. Better than any of its sisters is it fitted to fulfil the duty of making man familiar with his fellows and of explaining him to himself. It may be called the most significant of the arts, because every one of us, before we can adjust ourselves to the social order in which we have to live, must understand the prejudices and desires of others and also the opinions these others hold about the world wherein we dwell. Literature alone can supply this understanding. The other arts bring beauty into life and help to make it worth living; but since mankind came down from the family-tree of its arboreal ancestors, it is Literature which has made life possible. It is the swiftest and the surest aid to a wide understanding of others and to a deep understanding of ourselves. It gives us not only knowledge

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but wisdom; and thereby it helps to free us from vain imaginings as to our own importance. Ignorance is always conceited, since it never knows that it knows nothing; and even knowledge may be puft up on occasion, since it knows that it knows many things; but wisdom is devoid of illusion, since it knows how little it ever can know.

The poet Blake it was who declared that we never know enough unless we know more than enough;—and who of us is ever likely to attain to that altitude of comprehension? After all, even the most protracted investigation of fact and the most incessant meditation on truth must be circumscribed by the brief radius of human knowledge. What are threescore years and ten? What is a century, even? And as time pulses by, ever quickening its pace, we are often tempted to echo Lowell's envious ejaculation, "What a lucky dog Methuselah was! Nothing to know, and nine hundred years to learn it in!"

If Literature is the most venerable of the arts and if it is the most significant, should it not be approacht with the outward signs of reverence? When we stand up here to discuss it, to declare its importance and to consider its purpose, ought we not to robe ourselves in stately academic costume and to don gown and hood that the noble theme may be dealt with in all outward respect?

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Buffon was so possest by the dignity of letters that he put on his richest garb, with lace ruffles and gem-studded sword, before he sat him down at his desk to labor at his monumental work; and Machiavelli also arrayed himself "in royal, courtly garments," and thus worthily attired he made his "entrance into the ancient courts of the men of old."

But this lordly approach, alluring as it is, is not imperative, for Literature, lofty as it may be at times, is not remote and austere. At its best it is friendly and intimate. It is not for holidays only and occasions of state; it is for every-day use. It is not for the wise and the learned only, but for all sorts and conditions of men. It provides the simple ballad and the merry folk-tale that live by word of mouth generation after generation on the lonely hillside; and it proffers also the soul-searching tragedy which grips the masses in the densely crowded city. It has its message for all, old and young, rich and poor, educated and ignorant; and it is supreme only as it succeeds in widening its invitation to include us all. At one moment it brings words of cheer to the weak-kneed and the down-hearted; and at another it stirs the strong like the blare of the bugle. It has as many aspects as the public has many minds. It is sometimes to be recaptured only by diligent scholarship out of the dust of the ages;

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and it is sometimes to be discovered amid the fleeting words lavishly poured out in the books of the hour, in the magazines and even in the daily journals. It may be born of a chance occasion and yet worthy to survive thru the long ages—the Gettysburg address, for example, and the 'Recessional.'

II

LITERATURE is now what it was in the past, and it will be in the future what it is now, infinitely various and unendingly interesting. We can venture to project the curve of its advance in the years to come only after we have grasped what it is today; and we can perceive clearly its full meaning in our own time only after we have acquainted ourselves with its manifold manifestations in the centuries that are gone. True is it that literature is the result of individual effort and that its sublimest achievements are due to single genius; and yet it is racial also, and it is always stampt with the seal of nationality, which is the sum total of myriads of individuals. Literature is ever markt with the image and superscription of the people whose ideas it exprest and whose emotions it voiced. Races struggle upwards and establish themselves for a little while and then sink back helpless; mighty empires rise and

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fall, one after another, each believing itself to be destined to endure; and it is mainly by the literature they may chance to leave behind them that they are rescued from oblivion. What do we really know about Assyria and about Babylon? Where are the cities of old time? Why is it that we can see Sparta only vaguely, while Athens towers aloft in outline we all recognize? The massive monuments of Egypt persist thru thousands of years, but the souls of the dwellers in the valley of the Nile are not known to us as we know the souls of the Hebrews, whom they took captive and whose sacred books reveal to us their uplifting aspirations and their unattained ideals. We can extract not a little light from the laws of Rome, but not so much as we can derive from the minor writings of the Latins; and the code which is known as the "novels" of Justinian does not afford us as much illumination as the realistic fiction of Petronius. The many ruins of Rome are restored for us and peopled again with living men and women only when we read the speeches of Cicero, the lyrics of Horace and the letters of Pliny.

It is not in the barren annals of a nation that we can most readily discover the soul of a race. Rather is it in those lesser works of the several arts in which the men of old revealed themselves unconsciously and yet amply. The records of

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the historians and the codes of the lawgivers are assuredly not to be neglected, but they are not more significant than the unpretending efforts of forgotten artists,—the painters of the Greek vases, for instance, and the molders of the Tanagra figurines. The idyls of Theocritus are not less illuminating than the orations of Demosthenes or the tragedies of Æschylus.

Literature is precious for its own sake, but it has ever an added value from the light it cannot help casting on the manners and the customs which disclose the indurated characteristics of a people. The unmistakable flavor of the middle ages lurks in the etherealized lyrics of the German minnesingers no less than in the more mundane *fabliaux* of the French satirists. We cannot open a book, even if it shelters only evanescent fiction aiming solely to amuse an idle hour, without opening also a window on a civilization unlike any other; and he would be a traveler of marvelous ability who could make us as intimately acquainted with the simple rustics of the Black Forest, with the primitive peasants of Sicily or with the deserted spinsters of New England as we find ourselves after we have read a volume or two by Auerbach, by Verga or by Miss Wilkins. Some of us there are who love literature all the more because it can catch for us this local color, fixt once for all, and because it can pre-

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serve for us this flavor of the soil, this intimate essence of a special place and of a special period.

"The real literature of an epoch," so Renan declared, "is that which paints and expresses it," and such is the real literature of a race also. Perhaps the epoch is most completely painted and exprest when the author is interpreting the life that is seething about him, dealing directly with what he knows best, as Plautus has preserved for us the very aroma of the teeming tenements of the Latin metropolis, as Molière has limned for us the "best society" of France under Louis XIV, and as Mark Twain has set before us the simple ways of the Mississippi river-folk. But, after all, this does not matter much; and even if a writer is handling a theme remote from his own experience, he is still painting his own epoch and expressing his own race, altho he may not be aware of it. Whatever ineffectual effort he may make, no man can step off his shadow. However violently he seeks to escape, he is held fast by his heredity and his environment. 'Hamlet' is a tale of Denmark, 'Romeo and Juliet' is a tale of Italy, and 'Julius Cæsar' is a tale of ancient Rome,—but Shakspere himself was an Elizabethan Englishman; and these tragic masterpieces of his were possible only in the scepter'd isle set in the silver sea in the spacious days of the Virgin Queen. Racine borrowed his stories

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from Euripides, persuading himself that he had been able to make the old Greek drama live again; but his 'Phèdre' and his 'Andromaque' are French none the less and they are stampt with the date of the seventeenth century. So absolutely do they belong to the period and to the place of their author that Taine insisted that these tragedies of Racine could best be performed in the court-costumes and in the full-bottomed wigs of the reign of Louis XIV, since only thus could they completely justify themselves.

III

THIS intimate essence of nationality is evident not only in the thoughts that sustain the work of the artist and in the emotions by which he moves us, it may be discovered also in his style, in his use of words to phrase his thoughts and to voice his emotion, in the pattern of his composition and in the rhythm of his sentences. The way in which he links paragraph to paragraph may lead us back to his birthplace and the stock from which he sprang. We can catch the accent of his ancestors in the rise and fall of his periods; and sometimes it seems almost as tho his many forefathers were making use of him as their amanuensis.

Consider Shakspere and Bacon, and set them

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over against each other. They were contemporary Englishmen, alike and yet unlike, alert and intelligent, energetic and wise, both of them, yet with a different wisdom, masters of expression each in his own fashion, and possest of the interpreting imagination. When our attention is called to it by Mr. Havelock Ellis, we cannot fail to find that Shakspere, "with his gay extravagance and redundancy, his essential idealism, came of a people that had been changed in character from the surrounding stock by a Celtic infolding," and that Bacon, "with his instinctive grávity and temperance, the supprest ardor of his aspiring intellectual passion, his temperamental naturalism, was rooted deep in that East Anglian soil which he had never so much as visited."

To seek to seize these subtler differences, due not so much to nationality as to provinciality, if the word may be thus applied, is not to inquire too curiously, for it is to advance in knowledge and to draw a little nearer to that secret of genius which must remain ever the inexplicable result of the race, the individual, and the opportunity. There is not a little significance in Mr. Ellis's suggestion that we can perceive in the pages of Hawthorne a glamor of which "the latent aptitude had been handed on by ancestors who dwelt on the borders of Wales," whereas Renan came

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from a family of commingled Gascon and Breton descent, so that "in the very contour and melody of his style the ancient bards of Brittany have joined hands with the tribe of Montaigne and Brantôme." It was Comte who declared that "humanity is always made up of more dead than living."

There is significance also in the fact that the most of the major writers of Latin literature were not Romans by birth and that not a few of them were Spaniards,—Seneca for one and Martial for another. Petronius was possibly a Parisian; and the mother of Boccaccio was probably a French woman. It is to be noted also that Rutebœuf, Villon, Regnier, Scarron, Molière, Boileau, La Bruyère, Regnard, Voltaire, Beaumarchais, Béranger, and Labiche were all of them natives of Paris. Who can dispute the deduction that certain of the dominant characteristics of French literature may be due to the circumstance that so many of its leaders were born in the streets of the city by the Seine? May not this be one of the causes of that constant urbanity which is the distinguishing note of the best French authors? May it not be one of the reasons for that unfailing regard for his readers and that incessant effort to gage their capacity which possess the French men of letters?

That accomplisht scholar, Gaston Boissier, did

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not hesitate to assert that he wrote not for his fellow-investigators, but for the general reader. This is what all French authors have done when they have preserved the true Parisian tradition. They have willingly renounced overt individuality and they have shrunk from a self-expression which they could not transmit without the risk of shocking—or at least, of annoying—those to whom they were talking, pen in hand. They accepted the wholesome restraints of the rules of art, which, so M. Faguet has maintained, "are all of them counsels of perfection, allowing every exception which good taste will justify,—from which it results that the one important rule is to have good taste." The value of good taste in literature will be strikingly revealed to any one who comes from the profitable pleasure of reading Boissier's 'End of Paganism,' with its rich scholarship, its large and penetrating wisdom, its gentle urbanity and its ripe ease of style, to take up Pater's 'Plato and Platonism,' thin and brittle in its temper, artificial and affected in its manner, and, in a word, self-conscious and berouged. Still may we hail France in the words of the Scotchman, Buchanan:

> At tu, beata Gallia,
> Salve, bonarum blanda nutrix artium.

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IV

THERE is ever profit in this effort to seize the potent influence of heredity and environment even upon the genius who may seem at first glance to be the least controlled in the exuberance of his personality. We have graspt a true talisman of artistic appreciation when we compare the practical common sense and the austere gravity of the Roman with the inexhaustible curiosity and the open-minded intelligence of the Greek, and when we contrast the restraining social instinct of the French with the domineering energy of the English. But however interesting may be this endeavor to perceive the race behind the individual and to force it to help explain him, there are other ways not less instructive of seeking an insight into literature.

We can confine our attention, if we please, to a chosen few of the greatest writers, the men of an impregnable supremacy. We can neglect the minor writings even of these masters to center our affections on their acknowledged masterpieces. We may turn aside from the authors individually, however mighty they may be, and from their several works, however impressive, to consider the successive movements which one after the other have changed the stream of liter-

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ature, turning it into new channels and sweeping along almost every man of letters, powerless to withstand the current. We may perhaps prefer to abandon the biographical aspects of literature to investigate its biological aspects and to consider the slow differentiation of the several literary species, history from the oration, for example, and the drama from the lyric. Or, finally, we may find interest in tracing the growth of those critical theories about literary art which have helped and which have hindered the free expansion of the author's genius at one time or at another. There are many different ways of penetrating within the open portals of literature. All of them are inviting; all of them will lead a student to a garden of delight; and which one of them a man may choose will depend on his answer to the question whether he is more interested in persons, or in things, or in ideas.

There is unfading joy in a lasting friendship with a great writer, whether it is Aristotle, "the master of all that know," or Sophocles, who "saw life steadily and saw it whole," or Dante, who "wandered thru the realms of gloom," or Milton, the "God-given organ-voice of England." Such a friendship brings us close to a full mind and to a noble soul. And such a friendship can be had only in return for loyal service, for a strenuous resolve to spare nothing needed for full

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appreciation of the master's genius. A friendly familiarity with an author of cosmopolitan fame can be achieved only by wide wanderings to and fro here and there in the long centuries in search of the predecessors whom he followed, the contemporaries to whom he addrest his message, and the successors who followed the path he had been the first to tread. Wisely selected, by an honest exercise of our own taste, a single author may serve as a center of interest for the loving study of a lifetime. Lowell found that his profound admiration for Dante pleasantly persuaded him to studies and explorations of which he little dreamt when he began. A desire to understand Molière will lead an admirer of that foremost of comic dramatists to investigate the history of comedy in Greece and Rome, in Spain and Italy, and to trace out the enduring influence of the great French playwright on the later comedy of France, England and Germany; it will also tempt him into unexpected by-paths, whereby he may acquire information about topics seemingly as remote as the Jesuit methods of education, as Gassendi's revival of the atomic theories of Lucretius, and as the practice of medicine in the seventeenth century.

Closely akin to this devotion to one of the mighty masters of literature is the concentration of our interest on a single literary masterpiece.

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We may prefer to fill our ears with "the surge and thunder of the Odyssey" or to recall the interlinked tales "of the golden prime of good Haroun al Raschid." We may find ample satisfaction in following the footsteps of one or another of the largely conceived cosmopolitan characters, figures which have won favor far beyond the borders of their birthplace. Some of these heroic strugglers live only in the language which they lispt at first, while others have gone forth to wander from one land, one literature, one art, that they may tarry awhile in other lands, other literatures and other arts.

After all his travels Ulysses abides with his own people; the gaunt profile of Don Quixote still projects itself against the sharp hills of Spain; and Falstaff is at home only in the little island where he blustered boldly and breezily. But Faust is a seedling of one soil transplanted into another where he struck down deeper roots only to tower aloft again in the land of his origin. And Don Juan, the lyrical hero of a mystical Spanish legend, tarried in Italy, before he was received in France, where he was transformed into the implacable portrait of "a great lord who is a wicked man." And from the French drama 'Don Juan' strays into English poetry and into German music; so Faust, born obscurely in Germany, has ventured from English poetry into German

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drama and French music. It is well for the arts that there is and always has been free trade in their raw materials and that no custom-house can take toll on the ideas which one nation sends to another to be workt up into finisht products. From race to race, from century to century, from art to art, there is unceasing interchange of intellectual commodities; and no inspired statistician can strike the balance of this international trade whereby men are enabled to nourish their souls.

Nor are these brave figures the sole travelers whose wanderings we may trace from one literature to another, subduing their native accents to new tongues. Even humbler characters may bear a charmed life; and the intriguing slave of Greek comedy was taken over by the Latins, to revive after a slumber of more than a thousand years in the Italian comedy-of-masks and in the Spanish comedy of cloak-and-sword, from which he stept forth gaily to disguise himself as the Mascarille and the Scapin of Molière, and as the Figaro of Beaumarchais, of Mozart, and of Rossini.

V

ALTHO many lovers of letters may be tempted to devote themselves mainly to the masters and to the masterpieces of literature and to the perennial types which literature has seen fit to pre-

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serve thru the ages, there are other students who will find their profit in fixing their attention rather on the several movements which have modified literary endeavor. Even today one cannot help perceiving the persistence of the irrepressible conflict between the ideals of the Greeks, who sought for beauty always, and the ideals of the Jews, who set aloft duty. Hellenism swept swiftly from Athens to Rome and then to all the shores of the Mediterranean, until it spent its force and finally found itself desiccated into Alexandrianism. Then, in its turn, the Hebraic spirit, softened by Christianity, spread abroad from distant and despised Palestine until it attained to the uttermost boundaries of the wide-flung Roman empire. The influence of these contending ideals is still evident in this twentieth century of ours, especially in the obvious cleavage between the artistic aspirations of the races of Romance origin and those of the peoples of Teutonic stock.

Certain of the less admirable consequences of a narrow acceptance of the Hebraic doctrines revealed themselves in the misguided asceticism of the Middle Ages, thereby making easier the early triumphs of the Renascence, which was in its essence an effort to recapture the joyous liberty of the Greeks. The new learning, with its rediscovery of the wisdom of the ancients, was indeed a new birth for the arts, and not the least for

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literature. Man came into his own once again, and he was in haste to express himself. He drew a long breath and felt at last free to live. As was inevitable, he pusht back the limits of liberty until he sometimes attained an unworthy and unwholesome license. His new knowledge made him arrogant and intolerant; and he was ready to reject all restraint. Yet in time he was able to recover not a little of the harmony and of the proportion which had characterized the great Greeks, even if he never quite attained to their simplicity and to their sympathy.

Then the reaction came at last, and just as Hellenism had shriveled up into Alexandrianism, so the Renascence in its turn dried up into the empty and formal Classicism of the eighteenth century, with its code of rules for every art. Classicism lost its grasp on the realities of life and it cheated itself with words. It kept the letter of the law and refused to conform to its spirit. It sterilized the vocabulary of verse. It left the poet with no fit instrument for the wireless communication of emotion. In England it gave us the poetry of Alexander Pope and the criticism of Samuel Johnson. In France it codified the regulations which were responsible for a long succession of lifeless tragedies. And by its emphasis upon legislation to curb literature it brought about the reaction of the Romanticists,

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who succeeded only in the negative work of destruction and who failed lamentably to establish their more positive contentions.

Romanticism flourisht contemporary with the American revolution and the French; and in all its manifestoes there rings the tocsin of revolt. It promulgates its declaration of the Rights of Man in the domain of art; and it tends to a stark individualism leading straight to the anarchy which refuses to acknowledge any check upon the caprice of the moment. It exalts the illegal, the illegitimate and the illicit. It glorifies the outlaw and the outcast; and it relishes the abnormal rather than the normal, the morbid rather than the healthy. The violence and extravagance of the Romanticism of Victor Hugo, for example, made inevitable the Realism of Turgenef and Mr. Howells. The principle of art for art's sake, which the French Romanticists took for a battle-cry and which is stimulating if it is properly understood, is pernicious when it is misread to mean that the artist has no moral responsibility. Life is influenced by literature as much as literature is influenced by life. Many a suicide in Germany was the result of Werther's self-pitying sorrows; and many a young man in France took pattern by Balzac's sorry heroes.

As instructive as any study of these successive literary movements is an inquiry into the several

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literary species, with due consideration of their evolution, their permanence, and their occasional commingling one with another. There is a special pleasure in tracing the development of oratory, for example, from the days of the Greeks down to our own time, deducing its essential and eternal principles, and weighing the influence of Demosthenes on Cicero and of both on Bossuet and on Daniel Webster. There is an equal profit in observing how history has been able to separate itself from oratory on the one hand and from the epic on the other. A most interesting illustration of the progress from the heterogeneous to the homogeneous is to be found in the evolution of Athenian tragedy, which included at first much that was not strictly dramatic. It developed slowly out of the lyric; and in the beginning it contained choral dances, epic narratives and descriptive passages. Amid these confused elements it is not always easy to seize the essential action of the drama. But as Greek tragedy grew it came slowly to a consciousness of itself, and it eliminated one by one these non-dramatic accessories, until at last we find only a story shown in action and represented by a group of characters immeshed in an inexorable struggle. A parallel development took place a little later in the Greek comic drama, whereby the lyrical-burlesque of Aristophanes became the more prosaic

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comedy of Menander; the earlier conglomerate of incongruous elements discarded one by one its soaring lyrics, its personal lampooning and its license of political satire, while at the same time it steadily strengthened the supporting plot, with the appropriate interrelation of character and situation.

No literary species has had a more unexpected and a more unprecedented prosperity than the novel in prose, which in the nineteenth century became the most popular of forms, essayed by many a writer who possest only a small share of the native gift of story-telling. The novel is almost the only one of the literary species that the Greeks of the Golden Age did not develop and carry to a perfection which is the despair of all later men of letters. They seem to have cared little for prose-fiction; and when they had a story to tell they set it forth in verse, inspired by the muse of epic poetry. Today that forsaken maiden can find work fit for her hands only by laying aside her singing-robes and condescending to bare prose.

Two of the foremost of modern masters of prose-fiction, Cervantes and Fielding, have claimed that their stories were, in very truth, epics in prose. On the other hand, George Meredith seems to consider the novel to be derived rather from comedy; and there is no question that the

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expansion of prose-fiction was aided also by the delicate work of the seventeenth-century character-writers and of the eighteenth-century essayists. We may, if we choose, declare that the series of papers in which Steele and Addison sketched the character and the career of Sir Roger de Coverley was in fact the earliest of serial stories. In literature, as in life, he is a wise child who knows his own father; and a writer may have supposed himself to be a nameless orphan when in reality he is the missing heir of many honorable ancestors.

Prose-fiction may be the offspring of the epic and it may have received a rich legacy from the essay; but it has grown to maturity under the guardianship of the drama, and in the closest comradeship with both comedy and tragedy. The earlier novelists, Cervantes and Le Sage and Fielding, had all begun as playwrights; so also had the later Hugo and Dumas. The influence of Corneille and Racine on Mme. de La Fayette is as indisputable as the influence of Molière on Le Sage and of Ben Jonson on Dickens. And since it has become the dominant literary form, the novel has in its turn served as a stimulant to the drama. There is no difficulty in tracing the impression made by 'Gil Blas' on the 'Mariage de Figaro' and by 'Götz von Berlichingen' on 'Ivanhoe.' Nor can any disinterested inquirer

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dispute that the social dramas of Dumas *fils* and of Augier are deeply indebted to the 'Human Comedy' of Balzac, and that the earlier comedies of Sir Arthur Pinero and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones owe much to the mixture of humor and pathos to be found in the pages of Dickens and Thackeray.

VI

ONCE, when an American painter in Rome was told by a purse-proud picture-buyer that she did not pretend to know anything about art, but she did know what she liked, the irritated artist could not repress the swift retort, "So do the beasts of the field!" To know what we like is only the beginning of wisdom; and we ought to be able to give good reason for the faith that is in us. The French, who are subtly curious in their use of words, make a useful distinction between a *gourmet*, the delicate taster, and a *gourmand*, the gross feeder; and the distinction holds in literature as well as in life. The wise Goethe tells us that "there are three classes of readers,—some enjoy without judgment, some judge without enjoyment; some there are who judge while they enjoy, and who enjoy while they judge." It is within our power always to gain admittance into this third group and to attain a reasoned appreciation of the authors whose writings we relish.

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Indeed, we may even acquire an open-mindedness which will carry us a little further until we can understand how it is that sometimes we admire what we do not personally enjoy, and that on other occasions we may for the moment find pleasure in what we do not greatly admire. We can learn to control our likings; and in time we can correct our instinctive tendency to let our personal preferences erect themselves into eternal standards. Of course, these personal preferences must ever be the basis of our ultimate judgments, since we are born always with a bias in favor of one school or of the other. Our native tendency is toward the ancient or toward the modern, and we are by instinct either romanticists or realists, whether we are conscious of this prejudice or not. Our opinion may be as the leaves that change color with the revolving seasons, but our principles are rooted in us. It is fate rather than free will, which decides for us in which camp we will find ourselves enlisted. Before we were born it was settled for each of us, once for all, whether we should delight in the massive simplicity of the Attic dramatists, with their unerring union of a content of high value with a form that seems to be inevitable; or whether we should revel rather in the rich luxuriance and bold energy of the Elizabethans,—the one moving majestically with the sweep of

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a glacier, and the other boiling over with the impatience of a volcano.

But even if we cannot help being partizans, we ought to strive to master our prejudices so that we may learn at least to understand the spirit of the masterpieces wrought by those with whom we are not in accord. The critic needs not only insight and equipment; his task calls also for sympathy and for disinterestedness. The code of criticism is not as the law of the Medes and Persians which altereth not; it changes from race to race and from epoch to epoch; it is modified by the successive movements of human feeling and of human thought.

The scholars of the Renascence, secure in their inheritance of Greek wisdom, had a sublime belief in the comprehensiveness and in the certainty of their knowledge; but now in this new twentieth century of ours we moderns—

> Whom vapors work for, yet who scorn a ghost,
> Amid enchantments, disenchanted most,—

we are at last aware that we are but peering thru a chance crack in the dark wall which shuts us in, and that we can only glimpse a fragment of knowledge, glad that even so little is granted to us. We have surrendered the hope of ever attaining final truth; but none the less are we still nerved by the longing for it. Perhaps there are

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not a few who would echo Lessing's proud declaration that he valued the privilege of seeking the truth above the actual possession of it.

Criticism must needs lag behind creation, even if literary criticism may be also creation itself in its own fashion. The critic cannot do his work until after the lyrist and the dramatist and the orator have done theirs. It is on them that he feeds, and from their unconscious practice he derives his reasoned principles. In fact, it is only when the earlier impulse of poetry was beginning to slacken a little, that the critic came forward to undertake his parasitic task. He felt it to be his duty—as indeed it is—to apply to the present the standards of the past; and it was long before he was willing to recognize the possibilities that these standards might be found in the living languages as well as in the dead.

Apparently the earliest attempt to hold up a modern author as worthy of detailed study was in the fourteenth century, when Boccaccio began his lectures on Dante; and so late as the middle of the eighteenth century, when Gray was appointed to a chair of Modern Literature and Languages at Cambridge, he did not feel himself bound—so Lowell noted—to perform "any of its functions except that of receiving his salary." Yet, even then, Lessing had already conceived of literature as a single whole, however multi-

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form its manifestations might be in many tongues. Lessing is the first of modern critics, as he is the foremost; and he pointed out the path of progress to Sainte-Beuve, to Taine, and to Brunetière. It is due to their investigation into the laws that govern the evolution of literature that the attitude of criticism is now more tolerant and indeed more modest than it was when Ronsard felt himself authorized to speak of the "naïve facility" of Homer, and when Milton, with all his admiration, deemed that Shakspere "warbled native woodnotes wild." Thoreau anticipated our later opinion when he asserted that "in Homer and in Chaucer there is more of the serenity and innocence of youth than in the more modern and moral poets."

Brunetière was perhaps the most suggestive of recent literary critics, abounding in fertile generalizations, and applying to art ideas supplied by science. Here he was following Taine rather than Sainte-Beuve, who was more keenly interested in the idiosyncrasies of individual authors than in the larger movements of literature. Sainte-Beuve preferred to give us "biographic psychology," to borrow Taine's apt phrase. Yet even in criticism there are few real novelties; Sidney's 'Defence of Poesy,' for example, is imitated from the Italians; Taine's theory of the influence of heredity and environment is amplified from Hegel; and the

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objections which adverse critics have brought against the veracious realism of Mr. Howells are curiously akin to those that Petronius urged against the Roman poet, possibly Lucan, who had ventured to write an epic in which there was less inventive exuberance and more interpretative imagination. Gaston Boissier even discovered a vague premonition of the struggle-for-life theory in Saint Augustine's 'City of God.'

VII

TIME was when man lived in a cave until he learnt how to put together a wooden frame for a more commodious dwelling; then after a while he filled up this framework with the bricks he had found out how to bake, and traces of this temporary device are still evident in the decorations of the later and loftier temples which the Greeks built of marble. Only of late has man gone back to the primitive frame, putting it together now, not with wood but with wrought steel; and the sky-scraper, however modern it may seem to us, is in reality a reversion to an ancient type of building. A similar spectacle greets us in all the arts, especially in the art of literature,—the new is ever the old, even when it presents itself with all the latest improvements. Genius reveals itself when the hour is ripe; it does its work in its own

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fashion; it comes and it goes again, leaving us the richer. There have been many men of many minds; speaking in their several tongues; but literature is one and indivisible. It has a voice for every mood. It cheers and sustains; it inspires and uplifts; it lights the path for all of us. It passes the flaming torch from sire to son, Greece to Rome, Rome to the Renascence, the Renascence to the modern world.

All passes. Art alone
  Enduring stays to us;
The Bust outlasts the throne,—
  The Coin, Tiberius;

Even the gods must go;
  Only the lofty Rime
Not countless years o'erthrow,—
  Nor long array of Time.

(1909.)

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THE ECONOMIC INTERPRETATION OF LITERARY HISTORY

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[This was delivered as the Presidential Address to the Modern Language Association of America on December 28, 1910.]

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II

THE ECONOMIC INTERPRETATION OF LITERARY HISTORY

IT is ten years now since Professor Seligman publisht his acute and brilliant essay setting forth exactly what the economic interpretation of history really is. He made it plain that "the chief considerations in human progress are the social considerations," and that "the most important factor in social changes is the economic factor." There are other considerations, of course, and there is no warrant for the attempt to explain all history in economic terms alone. "The rise, the progress, and the decay of nations have been largely due to changes in economic relations, internal and external, of the social groups, even tho the facility with which mankind has availed itself of this economic environment has been the product of intellectual and moral forces. . . . So long as the body is not held everywhere in complete subjection to the soul, so long as the struggle for wealth does not everywhere give way to the struggle for virtue, the social structure and

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the fundamental relations between social classes will be largely shaped by these overmastering influences, which, whether we approve or deplore them, still form so great a part of the content of life."

Underlying many, if not supporting most, of the significant events in human history we can find, if we seek it diligently, an economic explanation, even tho other explanations may be more apparent at first sight. A majority of the mighty movements of mankind and of the salient struggles of the race, the stalwart efforts for freedom and for expansion, including not a few of those which may seem to be purely political, or intellectual, or even religious, have also an economic basis; they are to be explained as due in part at least to the eternal desire of every human being to better himself, to heap up worldly goods, and to secure himself against hunger. Attention has been called to the economic factors which helpt to bring about the American Revolution and the Civil War, as well as the French Revolution and the Boer War, and which can be traced also in the Spanish Inquisition, in the Crusades, and even in the expansion of Christianity. Professor Gilbert Murray has dwelt on the advantages possest by Mycenæ and Troy as trading sites; and he has ventured to suggest an economic explanation for the Greek expedition

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against Priam's capital. Perhaps the siege of Troy must be ascribed to the unwillingness of the seafaring merchants of Achaia to pay exorbitant tolls to the holders of the fastness which commanded the most convenient route for commerce.

Professor Seligman is clear in his warning that we must not put too heavy a burden on the theory he has expounded so skilfully and so candidly. "The economic interpretation of history, correctly understood, does not claim that every phenomenon of human life in general, or of social life in particular, is to be explained on economic grounds. Few writers would trace the different manifestations of language, or even of art, primarily to economic conditions." And yet there can be no rich and ample development of any art unless the economic conditions are favorable. These conditions may not be the direct cause of this development, but if they do not exist, it cannot take place. A distinguisht British art critic has asserted that the luxuriance of Tudor architecture is due directly to the introduction of root-crops into England. That is to say, the turnip enabled the sheep-farmers to carry their cattle thru the winter; and as the climate of the British Isles favors sheep-raising, the creation of a winter food-supply immediately made possible the expansion of the wool-trade, whereby large for-

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tunes were soon accumulated, the men thus enricht expending the surplus promptly in stately and sumptuous residences.

In political science the search for the fundamental economic causes of important events has resulted in an enlargement and a reinvigoration of historic study; and there is cause for surprise that a method so fertile has not been more frequently applied to the history of the several arts, and more especially to that of the art of letters. Perhaps one reason for the general neglect to utilize a suggestive method is to be found in the fact that the theory of the domination of every epoch by its great men, as set forth strenuously by Carlyle in his 'Heroes and Hero-Worship' and now thoroly discredited by modern historical science, has still an undeniable validity in the several arts. It may be that the American Revolution would have run its course successfully even if Washington had never been born, and that the Civil War would have ended as it did even if Lincoln had died at its beginning; but English literature would be very different if there had been no Shakspere, and French literature would be very different if there had been no Molière. History may be able to get along without its great men, but literature lives by its masters alone. It is only what they are. These mighty figures are so salient and so significant, they dwarf the

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lesser writers so overwhelmingly, that most histories of literature are content to be only a bede-roll of great authors.

This is unfortunate, since it gives us a defective conception of literary development. The history of any literature ought to be something more than a chronological collection of biographical criticisms, with only casual consideration of the movements of this literature as a whole. No one has yet written an entirely satisfactory history of English literature, showing its successive stages and the series of influences which determined its growth. With all its defects, Taine's stimulating book comes nearest to attaining this ideal,—altho we shall probably find it more adequately realized in M. Jusserand's monumental work when that is at last completed. Indeed, we have no handbook of English literature worthy of comparison with M. Lanson's school text-book of French literature, in which the biographies of authors are relegated to footnotes, leaving the text free for fuller treatment of large movements as the literature of France unrolls itself thru the ages.

The concentration of the historians of literature upon biography, pure and simple, has led them to neglect the economic interpretation and to give only casual consideration to the legal and political interpretation. Indeed, these three aspects

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are closely related; and all three of them demand a more searching investigation than they have yet received. No historian of English literature has brought out the intimate connection which may exist between public life and authorship as Gaston Boissier set it forth in his illuminating studies of the Latin men of letters in the early days of the Roman Empire. Of course, every chronicler of English literature has been forced to record the result of the closing of the London theaters by the Puritans, just as every chronicler of French literature has had to note the injurious restraint caused by the selfish autocracy of Louis XIV and of Napoleon. But there are a host of less obvious influences exerted from time to time in one literature or another by the political situation, by the insufficiency of the legal protection afforded to literary property, and by the economic conditions of the period, which have not been thoroly analized by the historians of any modern literature.

Perhaps there may be profit in pointing out a few of the obscurities which might be cleared up by the scholars who shall investigate these cognate influences upon literary expansion. For example, it would be instructive if some one should consider carefully to what extent the comparative literary sterility of these United States in the middle years of the nineteenth century, when we were abounding in energy, was due to the

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absence of an international copyright law, whereby our native writers were exposed to an unfair competition with the vendors of stolen goods. It would be useful also if some competent authority attempted to gage the effect of a similar legal deficiency on the English drama of the same period, and to indicate how much of the sudden expansion of the novel in Great Britain must be ascribed to the fact that it did not pay to write English plays because the theatrical managers could take French plays for nothing. And we should like to know how much of the abundant productivity of the French drama during the past hundred years was due to the secure position of the Society of Dramatic Authors, a trade-union organized by Beaumarchais in the eighteenth century and reorganized by Scribe early in the nineteenth, whereby it was made more profitable for a man of letters in France to compose plays than to compose novels. There would be benefit also in an inquiry into the question whether the high literary quality of the French drama of this epoch, far higher than that of the drama in any other language, was the indirect result of the support of the Théâtre Français by the government as a national museum for dramatic masterpieces.

"The existence of man depends upon his ability to sustain himself; the economic life is there-

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fore the fundamental condition of all life,"—to quote from Professor Seligman's monograph once more. "To economic causes, therefore, must be traced, in last instance, those transformations in the structure of society, which themselves condition the relations of social classes and the manifestations of social life." Just as armies are said to advance on their bellies, since they can never get too far ahead of the supply-train, so the arts can flourish only as the means of the people may permit. Feuerbach's famous phrase, "Man is what he eats," does not cover the whole truth about life; yet an artist cannot create beauty unless he eats. Food is a condition precedent to literature. A starving man is not likely to set himself down to compose an epic; and a bard is better fitted to chant the high deeds of heroes after the descendants of these worthies have given him bed and board. The literary laborer is worthy of his hire, and without a living wage he cannot ply his trade. In the past he has needed a patron or a pension, and in the present he needs popularity or private means. Martial once wrote out a recipe for making great poets: "Pay them well; where there is a Mæcenas there will be a Horace and a Vergil also." And Napoleon voiced an opinion not dissimilar in a letter, written from Berlin in 1806, in which he protested against the feebleness of the lyrics sung at the Opéra in honor

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of his victories: "Complaints are made that we have no literature; this is the fault of the Minister of the Interior."

There are four motives which may inspire an author to do his best,—the necessity for money, the lust for fame, the impulse for self-expression, and the desire to accomplish an immediate purpose. Sometimes they are all combined, altho many of the greatest writers—Shakspere, for one, and Molière, for another—seem to have cared little or nothing for the good opinion of posterity. The impulse for self-expression and the desire to accomplish an immediate purpose are both potent; but neither is as insistent and as inexorable as the necessity for money. In every country and in every age men of genius have been tempted to adventure themselves in that form of literature which happened then and there to be most popular and therefore most likely to be profitable. This is what accounts for the richness of the drama in England under Queen Elizabeth, for the vogue of the essay under Queen Anne, and for the immense expansion of the novel under Queen Victoria.

Dr. Johnson went so far as to assert that a man was a fool who wrote from any other motive than the need of money. This is a characteristically false utterance, and it is discredited by the significant fact that the piece of Johnson's own

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prose which has the most savor is his letter to Chesterfield, for which he was not paid and in which he was expressing himself without expectation of profit. Yet this saying of his may suggest a reason for the neglect which has befallen nearly all of Johnson's work. He wrote for pay; and he could not expect posterity to take pleasure in perusing what he had not taken pleasure in composing.

That the need for money has not always been the overmastering motive is made evident by the long list of authors, ancient and modern, who were not men of letters by profession, whose writings are by-products of their other activities, who composed without any thought of pay, and who took pen in hand to accomplish an immediate purpose. Franklin never wrote for money and he never publisht a book; his works consist only of occasional pamphlets; and probably nothing would more surprise him today than the fact that he now holds an honored place as a man of letters. Voltaire was a shrewd money-maker, a singularly adroit man of affairs; and only a small proportion of his large fortune was earned by his pen.

As M. Beljame has stated the case in his admirable discussion of the relations between the public and the men of letters in England in the

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eighteenth century, "so long as education is the privilege of a chosen few, so long as the taste for and the habit of reading are not spread abroad in a fair proportion of society, it is clear that writers can find in the sales of their works only an uncertain and insufficient resource." Literature as a profession, as a calling which shall support its man, is possible only after the earlier aristocratic organization has broadened into a more democratic condition, and after the appreciation of letters has ceased to be the privilege only of the few. So long as the narrower aristocratic organization endures, the man of letters cannot rely on his pen for support. He needs a Mæcenas; he sues for pensions; he hucksters his dedications. He may believe that poetry is his vocation, but he feels in need of an avocation to keep a roof over his head.

So it is that until the growth of a middle class and the extension of education combine to make the structure of society more democratic, and to supply at last a reading public large enough to reward the author's labor, literature can be little more than the accompaniment of its creator's other activities. Shakspere and Molière were actors; Fielding was a police magistrate and Scott was a sheriff; Burns was a gager and Wordsworth a stamp-distributer; Hawthorne had places in the revenue and consular services;

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Longfellow and Lowell were college professors. And it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that in the mid-years of the nineteenth century a large proportion of the New England writers were able to support themselves only because they were competent also to practise the allied art of the lecturer. The lyceum-system, as it was called, was long the mainstay of American literature. One man of letters used to declare that he lectured for fame,—F-A-M-E,—Fifty And My Expenses.

Only by his annual vagrancy as a lecturer was the frugal Emerson able to bring up his family. He was not blind to the inconveniences of the procedure, and in his journal he recorded that it seemed to him "tantamount to this: 'I 'll bet you fifty dollars a day for three weeks that you will not leave your library, and wade, and freeze, and ride, and run, and suffer all manner of indignities, and stand up for an hour each night reading in a hall;' and I answer, 'I 'll bet I will.' I do it and win the nine hundred dollars." And yet whatever its inconveniences and its indignities, the lyceum-system markt an economic advance; it made possible an appeal to the public as a whole. And as it enabled the lecturer to rely on his fellow-citizens, so it forced him to rub shoulders with them and to widen his own outlook on life; it was fundamentally anti-aristocratic.

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The lyceum-system in America provided the economic possibility which permitted Emerson to support himself without sacrifice of character. The lack of an equivalent economic possibility in England is responsible for the pitiful waste of the large genius of Dryden. M. Beljame has made it clear that under the Restoration there was really no public for an author to rely on. There was the corrupt court; there was a petty cotery of self-styled wits; and that was all. For books there was little or no sale, altho there were casual profits from fulsome dedications to noble patrons. As a result there is little vitality in the literature of the Restoration, little validity. And Dryden, a man of noble endowment, had to make a living by composing broad comedies to tickle the jaded courtiers,—a form of literature for which, as he confest frankly, he was not naturally gifted.

Dryden was born out of time, either too late or too early. His work would have been larger and richer had he been a younger contemporary of Shakspere, expressing himself in the full tragic form which Shakspere transmitted to those who followed him. It would have been more spontaneous had he been a contemporary of Pope or of Scott or of Tennyson. Even in Pope's time, separated from Dryden's by so brief a span, there had come into existence a reading public to which

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a poet could appeal. In the preface to the 'Dunciad,' Pope prided himself on the fact that he had never held office or received a pension or any gift from queen or minister.

> But (thanks to Homer) since I live and thrive,
> Indebted to no Prince or Peer alive.

And having gained nine thousand pounds by his translation, he felt independent enough to dedicate the long-expected book, not to any noble patron who would pay liberally for the honor, but to his fellow-author, Congreve.

In the century that intervened between Pope and Byron, the reading public kept on expanding and the publishing trade establisht itself solidly. The economic conditions of authorship were thereby immeasurably improved; and it would be interesting to speculate on the enrichment of English poetry by the natural outflowering of Dryden's genius which might have taken place if the author of 'Absalom and Achitophel' had been born a contemporary of the author of 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.' Scott at the same time, and Tennyson a half-century later, won large rewards by a direct appeal to the broadening body of readers; and yet who would be so bold as to suggest that Dryden was inferior to either of these popular poets in masculine vigor or in intellectual power?

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In Dryden's day literature had not yet become a profession, since a profession cannot be said to exist until it can support its professionals. Indeed, the final difference between the professional and the amateur is that the latter is willing to work for nothing, whereas the former demands his day's wages. Bayes, the hero of the 'Rehearsal' (in which Dryden was satirized), revealed himself as an amateur when he cried, "For what care I for money? I write for Fame and Reputation." And Byron stood forth a professional when he persisted in raising his rate of payment at the very time when he was insisting on Murray's treating him as a nobleman. The professional man of letters may be known by his respect for a check on the bank,—for what Lowell aptly described as "that species of literature which has the supreme art of conveying the most pleasure in the least space."

Altho the unfortunate economic condition of literature in his day especially affected Dryden, who felt himself forced to compose comedies of a doubtful decency, the author of 'All for Love' is far from being alone in this lack of adjustment between the work for which he was intended by native gift and the task to which he turned perforce to earn his living. As Dryden wrote comedies against the grain, so in their days Marlowe and Peele wrote plays of a more primitive type,

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altho neither of them had the instinctive faculty of the born playwright. Marlowe, of the mighty line, was essentially an epic poet, and it is by main strength that he built his cumbrous pieces. Peele was essentially a lyric poet, feeling feebly after a dramatic formula which was ever eluding his grasp. Both Marlowe and Peele were turned aside from the true expression of their genius by the ready pay of the playhouse, which then gave better wages than could elsewhere be had.

Later examples are abundant and significant. For instance, Steele and Addison elaborated the delightful eighteenth-century essay, with its easy briskness and its playful social satire; and Goldsmith, in his turn, found the form ready to his hand and exactly suited to his special gift. But because this airy and graceful essay had an enduring popularity and because it brought in a prompt reward in cash, it was attempted by the ponderous Dr. Johnson, who had not the natural lightness, the intangible charm, and the allusive felicity which the essay demanded.

In the nineteenth century the vogue of the essay was succeeded by the vogue of the novel, which was tempting to not a few as little fitted for it as Johnson was for the brisk essay. Brougham and Motley and Froude severally made shipwreck in fiction. Perhaps it is not fanciful to suggest that it was the desire for the pecuniary

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reward that fiction then proffered abundantly which lured George Eliot into novel-writing rather than any native impulse to story-telling. Her labored narratives, rich as they are in insight into humanity, lack spontaneity; they are the result of her intelligence primarily; they are built by obvious effort. If the economic conditions of literature in the nineteenth century had been different, it is unlikely that Mary Ann Evans would ever have attempted fiction. And Charles Reade, who liked to think of himself as a more original novelist than George Eliot, used to assert that he had been intended by nature for a dramatist, and that he had been forced into fiction by bad laws. Quite possibly Augier and the younger Dumas, had they written in English, might have felt the same legal oppression coercing them to give up the drama for prose-fiction.

Novels may be written for money, but history must be a labor of love. Now and again, most unexpectedly, a historical work happens to hit the public fancy and to bring to its surprised author an unexpected reward for his toil. But this is only a happy accident, most infrequent; and the historian can count himself fortunate if he has not to pay out of his own pocket for the publication of his work. As Rivarol said, "There are virtues that one can practise only when one is rich;" and the writing of history is one of

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these virtues. Macaulay toiled long in India that he might accumulate the modest fortune which would give him leisure to undertake the researches that were to sustain his historical work. Gibbon and Prescott and Parkman were lucky in inheriting the sufficient estates which enabled them to live laborious days without taking thought of the morrow. Indeed, it must be admitted that here is one of the best defenses of inherited wealth—that in every generation a few pickt men are set free for unremunerative investigations, not otherwise likely to be undertaken.

While history is thus seen to be more or less dependent on economic conditions, its close ally, oratory, is dependent rather upon political conditions. In the last analysis, oratory is the art of persuasion; it is lifeless and juiceless when the speaker has not set his heart upon influencing those he is addressing; and therefore it is impossible where there is no free speech. In fact, it can flourish only in a free people, and it stiffens into academic emptiness whenever the citizen is muzzled. It ceased in Greece as soon as the tyrants substituted their rule for the large freedom of the commonwealth; and it froze into formality in Rome as soon as the Empire was erected on the ruins of the Republic. It developt healthily in Great Britain and in the United States as the people came to take political power into their

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own hands. In France, under the monarchy, it could flourish only in the pulpit, within the narrow limitations of the Lenten sermon and of the funeral discourse; and as a result the orators of the Revolution, after they had achieved the right to speak out, had no models to keep them from artificiality and from pedantry; they lackt the experience of actual debate which trains for directness and for sincerity.

Just as the full development of oratory is dependent upon political conditions, so the ample expansion of the drama is dependent on social conditions. When Longfellow declared that the country is lyric and the town dramatic he had in mind probably the fact that the lyric poet deals with nature, whereas the dramatic poet deals with human nature. The lyric poet may live in rural solitude, chanting his own emotions at his own sweet will. The dramatic poet has to dwell with the throng, that he may gain intimate knowledge of the varied types of humanity he needs to people his plays. But he is compelled to the city by another fact,—the inexorable fact that only where men are massed together can the frequent audiences be found which alone can support the theater. The drama is a function of the crowd; and it is impossible in a village community where the inhabitants are scattered over the distant hillsides. It can flourish only in the

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densely populated cities, where all sorts and conditions of men are packt together, restless and energetic. No dramatist ever had a chance to develop except in an urban community where the actual theater provided him with the means of practising his art. If any man born with the instinctive faculty of playmaking, the essential dramaturgic quality, had ever chanced to grow to maturity in a purely rural environment, he must have been driven forth to a city, or else from sheer lack of opportunity he must have failed to accomplish what he vaguely desired. In the remote village a "mute, inglorious Milton" might perchance develop into an "enamored architect of airy rime"; but a Shakspere would be doomed to remain mute and inglorious.

The drama, being dependent on the mass of men, being a function of the crowd, has never been aristocratic, as certain of the other forms of literary art may have been now and again. Indeed, the drama is the only art which is inherently and inevitably democratic, since the playwright cannot depend upon a cotery of the cultivated only or on a clique of dilettants. It is the playwright's duty, as it is his pleasure also, to move men in the mass, to appeal to them as fellow human beings only, to strive to ascertain the greatest common denominator of the throng. To say this is to suggest that the drama is likely

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to gain steadily in power, now that the chief nations of the modern world are organized at last upon a democratic basis. And the prediction may be ventured also that if the rising tide of socialism ever succeeds in overwhelming democracy and in substituting collective effort for personal endeavor, the drama will be the first art to suffer, since it exists primarily to set forth the clash of contending desires and the struggle of individual wills.

Literature cannot help being more or less aristocratic in its tone when the man of letters must look for his living to pensions from the monarch or to largess from a wealthy patron. Literature becomes democratic inevitably when the man of letters is released from this servitude to a social superior and when he finds himself free to appeal for support to the public as a whole. Economic and political and legal conditions need to be taken into account by all historians of literature, ancient and modern. "While his appearance at a particular moment appears to us a matter of chance, the great man influences society only when society is ready for him." So Professor Seligman has asserted, adding the apt comment that "if society is not ready for him, he is called not a great man, but a visionary or a failure."

He who possesses the potentiality of becoming one of the great men of literature may be

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born out of time or he may be born out of place. For the full expansion of his genius he needs the fit moment and the fit environment; and without the one or the other he may be crusht and maimed. And yet if he has the ample largeness of true genius, he is likely to have also the shrewd common sense of the man of affairs. He will have the gift of making the best of things as they chance to be, without whining and without revolt. He will rise superior to circumstances, either because he is supple enough to adapt himself to them, or because he is strong enough to conquer them, turning into a stepping-stone the obstacle which weaker creatures would find only a stumbling-block.

(1910.)

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IN BEHALF OF THE GENERAL READER

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III

IN BEHALF OF THE GENERAL READER

LORD CHESTERFIELD once warned his son against "the communicative and shining pedants who adorn their conversation, even with women, by happy quotations of Greek and Latin." And he added the excellent advice to shun empty display: "If you would avoid the accusation of pedantry on the one hand, or the suspicion of ignorance on the other, abstain from learned ostentation. Speak the language of the company you are in; speak it purely, and unlarded with any other."

It is a pity that Chesterfield's suggestion to his son has not produced more impression upon certain of the writers of our time. There is one prolific British author who might be cited as a horrible example, since his pages are a ragbag of allusions and quotations in any and every language. The assumption of this writer seems to be that all the readers of any of his works are as familiar with these languages as he is himself,

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and that they will recognize the most recondite allusions collected during his own multifarious reading. This is most intolerable and not to be endured; it is nothing less than the superfluity of naughtiness. It is akin to the arrogant insolence of the bishop who quoted Hebrew in a sermon to a remote and rustic congregation, and who justified himself with the airy explanation that "everybody knows a little Hebrew."

Now, everybody does not know a little Hebrew. Everybody does not know even a little French or German. Not every one of us has had even a little Latin, to linger indistinct and doubtful in the recesses of his memory. And those who happen to have Hebrew and Latin may not have any French or German, just as those who are on speaking terms with these modern tongues may never have been introduced to the ancient languages. No author has any right to assume that any reader is possest of precisely his own equipment; and at bottom such an assumption is simply impertinent. And therefore every author would do well to ponder Chesterfield's command to "speak the language of the company you are in; speak it purely, and unlarded with any other." More than eight centuries ago, Giraldus Cambrensis askt,—"Is it not better to be dumb than to speak so as not to be understood?"

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The presumption that an author is at liberty to do as he pleases in his own book is contrary to the fundamental and eternal principle that books are written for the benefit of the readers,—or at least that books are publisht for the benefit of the readers. The author, after having composed his work for his own delight, to express himself, is under no compulsion to give it to the world. He is justified in so doing only if he conceives that his writing has a purpose to accomplish,—that is, if he believes that it will bestow either pleasure or profit upon those who may peruse it. If he refuses to consider his readers, then the publication of his book is for the sake of the writer himself, not of these readers. It becomes an exhibition of essential selfishness, mere vanity and vexation of spirit. A book ought to be rich with the full flavor of the author's personality; primarily it ought to express him, but secondarily it is for the sole benefit of the reader. It is a pretty poor book that brings joy chiefly to its author.

A book which is worth while is a special message from its writer to the readers; and the reception of the message is, and must be, in proportion to the skill with which this message has been phrased to appeal to all who are willing to hear it. To say this is not to suggest that the author must write down to the level of "the man

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in the street"; and yet many of the masterpieces of literature—Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe,' for example, and Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress,' Whitman's 'O Captain, my Captain' and Kipling's 'Recessional,' Voltaire's 'Charles XII' and Lincoln's 'Gettysburg Address'—are not elevated above the easy comprehension of those whose educational opportunities have been but scant. The author need not "write down," but he ought to "write broad,"—if the term may be ventured. He ought to be possest of a sympathetic understanding of the state of his readers' minds, of their previous knowledge of the subject, of their opinions, and even of their prejudices. He may choose the class of readers whom he wishes to reach; and then he must ever keep in mind the capabilities and the limitations of all the members of this group.

It is the good fortune of the drama that it is the most democratic of the arts, since it must direct itself to the people as a whole. Yet this appeal to the multitude has never debased the drama. 'Hamlet' and 'Tartuffe' are most popular plays; and they are also masterpieces of dramatic art. Shakspere and Molière did not condescend to the public; they gave that public the best they had in them, but with the utmost care to give it also what they knew it relisht. Of course, very few pieces have ever had the breadth

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of appeal of 'Hamlet' and 'Tartuffe'; and the modern dramatist, when he is building his play, is likely to have in mind some subdivision of the throng,—either the larger segment that craves the fierce joys of melodrama or the smaller cross-section that is ever eager to discuss the problem-play.

It is a choice of this sort that the writer of books is bound to make before he starts in on his work,—and especially the writer of history, of biography, and of criticism. Is he going to write for the general reader, for the average man and woman of average intelligence and of average education? Or is he resolved to limit the circulation of his work to the tiny knot of his fellow-specialists? In other words, shall he follow the example of the French or the example of the Germans? Shall he make his book readable by all, as the French try to do? Or shall he be satisfied to have it hopelessly unreadable, except by a restricted circle of like-minded students, as the Germans very often prefer to do. It is true, of course, that there are French books which are hopelessly unreadable, and it is sad to see that their number has been increasing of late. It is equally true that there are also German books which are as readable as the best of the French. Yet the distinction holds good in the main; and there is no denying that the German is inclined

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to address himself mainly to his fellow-scholars, whereas the Frenchman deliberately devotes himself to the task of interesting the general reader. The Germans insist on scientific thoroness, and they are willing to pay a heavy price for it. The French are governed by the social instinct which urges them to endeavor to please and to attract. "Your scientific critic is usually a wearisome creature," said John Burroughs; and the Teutonic investigator is often pitiless in his stern resolution to approve himself a scientific critic. The French view is scarcely overstated in an early letter of Taine's in which he dared the assertion that "at bottom, books are not books unless they are amusing; the others are only library furniture." There are works of immense learning and of immediate utility which are like library furniture in that they are certain sooner or later to be outworn.

Where the German toils like a man of the cloister, a secluded Benedictine, aiming to be appreciated only by those whose training has been as arduous as his own, disdainful of the plaudits of the vulgar, and almost suspicious of any outside popularity, the Frenchman remains a man of the world, interested in life as much as in literature, not neglectful of the latest accretions of knowledge, but holding these to be valuable only as they can be coördinated into a more

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comprehensive consideration of the subject in its larger relations. Where the German scholar is likely to be solitary, the French scholar is social and sociable. Gaston Boissier, who combined Teutonic thoroness with Gallic clarity and charm, once declared the principles which underlie French literature and which explain its universality. The French author is rarely a solitary dreamer, so Boissier tells us; "like the orator, he seeks to convince and to persuade. He addresses himself to the public. He takes pains to be clear so that he may be understood, whatever the subject he may be treating. He arranges his matter carefully; he develops his ideas into generalities; he wants to be comprehended by all."

It is partly because this has been the ideal of the French man of letters that French literature has won its way all over the world, and that French is still the second language of every educated man, whatever his native speech. French literature has the element of universality; intensely national as it may be, it is not narrowly local; it appeals to humanity at large. One of my colleags at Columbia has told me that he once heard a professor in a German university advise his students to buy the French translation of his own monumental work rather than the German original,—because the French version was clearer and therefore more easily read.

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Transparent clarity is the dominant characteristic of French literature. This may account in part for the inadequacy of French poetry; but it is an inestimable profit for French prose. A French book is widely read in its own language outside the borders of France; and it lends itself easily to translation into a host of strange tongues.

To Germany we have to go for the army of books which extend the confines of knowledge; and yet not a few German books almost force us to conquer that knowledge for ourselves. The facts we are seeking are contained in the works of the German author, or they are concealed there, entangled with a heterogeny of other facts, which cumber the pathway to our goal. Sometimes we are almost stunned by the noise of the apparatus which intimidates us from the approach to the essential product. The facts are there somewhere, if we can only find them, and the ideas, also, which interpret those facts; but these are likely to be inextricably commingled with other facts and other ideas, with endless quotations and endless citations and endless references.

As a result we cannot help regretting that Dr. Holmes did not carry out a humorous suggestion he once let fall: "I sometimes feel as if I should like to found a chair to teach the ignorance of what people do not want to know."

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Here in the United States, of late years, many of our historians and biographers and not a few of our literary historians have gone to school to the Germans, to their abiding profit. They have learnt the needed lesson of scientific solidity of knowledge. Unfortunately, some of them have also imbibed from their Teutonic teachers not only a taste for absolute precision of information, but also a relish for insisting upon the results of their praiseworthy industry. They set forth the minutest details of their investigations. In their recoil from the quagmire of "belles-lettristic trifling" they fall into the abyss of pedantry. They are making books which are not only unreadable by the average reader, but which are frankly not intended to be read by anybody except by a very limited circle of fellow-specialists. They discuss the least important technical details and indulge in interminable controversy over minor questions. They assume in every reader an acquaintance with the preceding stages of the discussion. Such books are contributions rather to science than to literature; they are honorable and necessary; they are the outward and visible signs of exact scholarship. But obviously their appeal is, and must be, limited to the small group of investigators to which their own authors severally belong. And there is always a danger that these tireless students may be tempt-

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ed in time to accept their work as an end in itself, and not merely as a means toward a wider wisdom. They may be willing to echo the recent remark of an American professor of history who declared that a certain publication was his ideal of what a book ought to be, because its pages contained but two or three lines of text at the top, the remaining space being surrendered to foot-notes, stuft with references and citations.

Plainly enough, the author of any book built upon this plan must have renounced in advance all hope of attracting any readers other than those who were as strictly scientific as he was himself. His book is not a book, it is only library furniture, to be utilized on occasion, but never to be enjoyed. It may have the scientific virtues, but it is devoid of artistic attributes. Its defects are intentional, no doubt, but they are none the less deplorable. They are due to a mistaken standard,—or at least to the adoption of a standard which the greatest historians have rejected. Gibbon, for example, built a monument more enduring than brass; and for nearly a century and a half his massive work has withstood the ravages of time and the assaults of those who have been unwilling to accept his opinions. His 'Decline and Fall' has scientific thoroness and also artistic fascination. The ample narrative flows unimpeded thru his pages;

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and his foot-notes do not obstruct the current, even if they are often as good reading as the text itself.

More than half a century later, Mommsen put forth his history of Rome, constructed by a mighty effort of historic interpretation and only occasionally weighted down by a foot-note which might distract the attention of the general reader, for whose benefit it had been directly prepared. Apparently the great German historian felt that to vaunt his own researches and his own original interpretations and to thrust forward the sources of his extended knowledge would be an act akin to that of the architect of a towering cathedral, who should insist on leaving up the scaffolding which had facilitated its erection. Mommsen conscientiously addrest his history of Rome to the general reader, and took his measures accordingly not to repel but to attract this reader. His constitutional history, on the other hand, from the very nature of its subject, could not appeal to the general reader, but only to the specialist in political science. Therefore this later work was very properly prepared upon a different plan; it was designed for the more restricted group of professional students, and for their sake it was buttrest with quotations, citations and references.

There is no warrant for the prevalent belief

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that there is a necessary conflict between scientific thoroness in preparation and artistic attractiveness of presentation. The scientific historian may very properly despise the essential falsity of Carlyle's 'French Revolution'; but the only sound basis for their contemptuous dislike must be sought in the Scotch humorist's wilful neglect of necessary information of which he might easily have availed himself, and not in the interpretative imagination he displayed in evoking the striking figures of that strange turmoil. Carlyle is to be discredited, not because he had the skill of a literary artist, but because he was wanting in scientific integrity. And this is also the verdict which must be rendered upon the histories of Carlyle's disciple, Froude. The two British historians have fallen out of favor with serious students, not on account of their possession of art but on account of their lack of science. As Gibbon proved, and Mommsen also, science and art are not incompatible or even hostile.

Perhaps there is no better example of the skilful driving of science and art harnest to the same wagon, than can be found in Gaston Boissier's illuminating studies of Roman life and character in the last days of the Republic and the early days of the Empire. In this great scholar's pages Cicero and his friends stand out as they lived; the springs of their actions and the temper of their

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minds are laid bare. These vital portraits are the result of the utmost intimacy with the records left by Cicero and his contemporaries, and with the latest researches of the humblest investigators. No doubt has ever been cast upon the solidity of Boissier's scientific knowledge of the period or of the persons he presented to us. Boissier is as scientific as Gibbon or as Mommsen, and, like them, he refrained from all wanton parade of his scholarship. When he composed one of his interpretative resuscitations he abided by his own explanation; like the orator, he sought to convince and to persuade; he addrest himself to the general public; he took pains to be clear; he arranged his matter carefully; he developt his ideas into generalities; he wanted to be comprehended by all. And in thus achieving art he did not forgo science; that was the solid support of his alluring essays; that was the steel frame, hidden within and yet supporting the external beauty of his marble arches.

In Gaston Boissier's books art is always visible and science is ever concealed. There is rarely a Latin quotation or even a Latin word; and any foreign term, when it does occur, is invariably elucidated for the benefit of those unfamiliar with the language of the Romans. There is scarcely a foot-note, except now and again the citation of an authority or a courteous reference to the explana-

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tion put forth by some other scholar. Indeed, Boissier's foot-notes are fewer than Mommsen's and far fewer than Gibbon's; and when he traces for us the intricate complexities of the opposition under the Cæsars, our attention is never distracted from the pellucid narrative in which he has distilled the results of his indefatigable study. Above all, his writings are wholly free from all controversy over the opinions of other scholars with whom he has failed to find himself in accord, and we are never detained or annoyed by acrimonious wranglings or by discourteous personalities. He is as unpedantic as may be; he writes like a man of the world, familiar with all that has happened since the period he is dealing with, and apt in recalling modern instances to illuminate ancient conditions. He is continually explaining the present by the past, and the past by the present. His attitude is always that of a courteous host, who welcomes us by setting before us his best wine, but who never insists on our inspecting the ample cellars whence his choice vintages have been drawn.

There is an old saying that a good workman is known by his chips; yet the accomplisht craftsman does not send these chips to the customer to certify his workmanship. He lets the product of his labor speak for itself, and he is never tempted to invite the rest of us into the workshop that we may spy into the secrets of his trade. Now, this

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is just what many modern craftsmen persist in doing, seduced by the bad example of the Germans and neglecting the good example of the French. They demand that we take notice of the skeleton, overlooking the fact that only the tortoise wears his backbone on the outside and that the higher vertebrates prefer to conceal theirs. This scientific skeleton ought to sustain the body, no doubt, but there is no need to force it into view. Perhaps this parade of the necessary apparatus may be pardoned in young scholars, in whose work it is the evidence of adequate preparation. But it is no longer needed when the neophyte has won his spurs. The more mature writer may dismiss his list of authorities and all his paraphernalia of bibliography to the harmless and necessary appendix, which may serve as a reservoir of information for the benefit of those who wish to drink deep. When his 'prentice years are left behind him, he need not feel called upon to prove his acquaintance with the tools of his trade. This is then to be taken for granted; and there is no necessity to flaunt it in the face of the general reader.

That it is possible to unite scientific thoroness and artistic presentation has been proved by Gibbon and Mommsen, Boissier and Parkman, an Englishman and a German, a Frenchman and an American. The ability to do this is not the exclusive possession of the scholars of any one

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nationality, altho it is more common among the French, since they are franker in their recognition of the social instinct. It can be discovered in the Greek studies of Jebb and Butcher, and in the American histories of Motley. It is as evident in the biological essays of Huxley as in the psychologic papers of William James. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a better example of the combination of science and art than can be discovered in the brilliant pages of James. His discussions of the complex problems of physiological psychology—discussions rich in speculative suggestions, wealthy with original inquiry, and with imaginative ingenuity—are yet so simply stated that they can be understood by every one. They are contributions to science which only his fellow-scientists can properly appreciate; but none the less do they appeal to the average reader of average education and of average intelligence.

To write so as to satisfy one's equals and so as to appeal also to those who are not specialists,—that is not easy. Yet it can be achieved by taking thought; and it is worth all the pains it costs. That way wisdom lies; and the sooner American scholars recognize this truth, the better it will be for the future,—if our literature is to be enricht with books that are books and not merely library furniture.

(1911.)

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THE DUTY OF IMITATION

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IV

THE DUTY OF IMITATION

ONCE when I was chatting about the principles of literary art with Mr. Rudyard Kipling, I chanced to tell him that I had pointed out to a class of college students the several masters of story-telling in whose footsteps he had trod and by whose examples he had obviously profited. He smiled pleasantly and then slily drawled out, "Why give it away? Why not let them think it was just genius?"

This was a shrewd retort. The craftsman himself, in whatsoever art he may be laboring, is always intensely interested in its technic, in its traditions, and in its processes. But the public he is addressing has a positive distaste for being taken into the workshop and for having its attention called to the scattered chips. It prefers to believe that the masterpiece it blindly admires is the result of intangible and inexplicable genius. It likes to look upon the artist as a magician, as a wonder-worker, and it is inclined to resent

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any disclosure of the hidden means whereby he has wrought his marvels. Whenever the rest of us are allowed a glimpse, however fleeting, into the studio or the laboratory, whenever the successive stages of the making of a masterpiece are laid bare before our eyes, the mystery of its creation is torn away, and as a result its reputation is instantly lowered.

Moore dealt a sad blow to the fame of Richard Brinsley Sheridan when he printed the tentative drafts of the 'School for Scandal' and revealed the varied hesitations which had accompanied the composition of that brilliant comedy. Poe disenchanted a host of his admirers when he publisht the 'Philosophy of Composition' and proclaimed aloud the motives and the methods whereby he had achieved the haunting melancholy of the 'Raven.' The celebrity of Shakspere and of Molière is the more solidly establisht with the public at large because neither of them ever rent the veil which shrouded from vulgar gaze the secret of their supreme achievements. They abide our question, but they proffer no clues for its solution. We are left guessing as to the exciting cause of this tragedy or of that comedy; we may assure ourselves, if we choose, that infinite pains went to its making, but none the less does the work itself stand forth in its simple perfection, not narrowed in our gaze by

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any commentary of its author. It is what it is, and we can read into it whatever we please, since we can surmise the intent only by the result. Shakspere and Molière may have builded better than they knew; but as to this they have made no confession, and we are reduced to conjecture only. If their art cannot always conceal itself absolutely, at least it avoids all overt self-revelation.

Stevenson was a little like Poe in his fondness for talking about himself, and in his constant interest in analizing the arduous problems of style and of structure and the hidden principles of honest narrative. Perhaps there is no more characteristic passage in all his writings—and certainly there is none more illuminating—than that in which he described his own apprenticeship to the art of letters. It is in his delightfully personal paper on 'An Old College Magazine' (in which he went back joyfully to his undergraduate days at Edinburgh) that he made his significant record of his own stylistic experiments: "I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read and one to write in. Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me, in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was some conspicuous force or happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to

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ape that quality. I was unsuccessful and knew it. I tried again and was again unsuccessful, and always unsuccessful, but at least in these vain hours I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony and construction and coordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire and Obermann." Then he added that one essay of his, composed at first in imitation of Hazlitt, had been rewritten in imitation of Ruskin, only to emerge again and at last as an imitation of Sir Thomas Browne.

To this frank avowal Stevenson appended the moral,—"that, like it or not, is the way to learn to write." And he adduced in proof that "it was so Keats learnt, and there never was a finer temperament"; so also Montaigne and Burns learnt, and "Shakspere himself, the imperial." The moral Stevenson drew has been rejected by not a few youthful critics who have never put themselves thru this severe gymnastic; they have scoft both at his precept and at its result in his own practice. His style has been described as "dextrous, wonderful, fascinating," an "exquisitely elaborated piece of mosaic, but too self-conscious to be called good architecture."

But even if this assault on Stevenson's practice might be accepted, it would not invalidate

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his precept. Newman's style is not open to any of the exceptions which may be urged against Stevenson's; it is not a self-conscious piece of mosaic; it is "good architecture." And in his 'Idea of a University' Newman had already declared the principle which Stevenson was to reaffirm; and he had already confest that he too had played the sedulous ape. He asserted that there were certain masters of literature whose style "forcibly arrests the reader, and draws him on to imitate it, by virtue of what is excellent in it, in spite of such defects as, in common with all human works, it may contain. I suppose all of us will recognize this fascination." Then comes the avowal which is so curiously akin to Stevenson's. "For myself, when I was fourteen to fifteen, I imitated Addison; when I was seventeen, I wrote in the style of Johnson; about the same time I fell in with the twelfth volume of Gibbon, and my ears rang with the cadence of his sentences, and I dreamt of it for a night or two. Then I began to make an analysis of Thucydides in Gibbon's style."

We may go even farther back and find the confession of Newman and of Stevenson anticipated by Franklin, who has recorded in his 'Autobiography' how he in his time had played the sedulous ape to Steele and Addison, dissecting the essays of the stray volume of the 'Spectator'

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which had fallen into his hands, and combining again the fragments in the strenuous effort to surprize the secret of their easy clarity. But there is no need to multiply examples. Of a truth, "that is the way to learn to write,"—to study in the workshop of the masters and to seek to use their tools as best we can.

It is not style only which can be acquired by this method, but structure also, the larger framework of an essay or of a novel, of a play or of a history. The 'Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' would never have come into being if Poe and Hawthorne had not pointed out the path to its narrator; and David Balfour would not have been able to risk his many unexpected experiences if the valiant heroes of Defoe and Scott and Dumas had not already gone in quest of adventure. It is thus that the novice can teach himself to say what he has to say, how to digest his material, how to shape it for the public eye, how to present it to the best advantage. He must learn this difficult art from many masters in turn, absorbing the processes of each of them, assimilating their methods and finding out at last how to be himself.

Of course, he must not linger too long at the feet of any of his instructors or he will run the risk of being a copyist only. If he does that, he will take over the faults of his model, rather than

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the merits, since these are more easily caught. There is safety in numbers, when each of the teachers serves as a corrective of the others, until the 'prentice artist comes into an originality of his own, compounded of many simples. As Gounod once wrote to a friend, "Don't listen to those who tell you not to imitate the masters; that is not true. You must not imitate one, but all of them. You can become a master yourself only on condition that you are akin to the best." And Legouvé said the same thing: "the only way not to copy anybody is to study everybody."

This is the advice of the wise critics as well as of the wise artists. Quintilian laid down the law long ago: "A great portion of art consists in imitation, since tho to invent was first in order of time, and holds the first place in merit, yet it is of advantage to imitate what has been invented with success." Ben Jonson was as emphatic in urging the duty of imitation as Sir Joshua Reynolds was to be. And only a little while ago Brunetière repeated forcibly the counsel of these elders: "We begin by imitating our models or our masters; and we can do nothing better, for if we are unwilling to imitate or to follow anybody, life would be over before we could get to work, and it is well also that every generation should continue its predecessor."

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This last remark is specially suggestive. No one of us should renounce the heritage of the ages, and no one of us could, if he would. We cannot help being our own contemporaries, who are all continuing our predecessors, consciously or unconsciously. The beginner must imitate somebody, since no art can be born again for his own benefit. And if this could be, it would not be for his benefit but for his perdition. The primitives belong in their own period, and they have their own appeal; but they are out of place today, and even if any of us wanted to vie with them, it is out of his power to turn back the hands of the clock.

The beginner cannot make a fresh start for himself and deny himself the advantage of what has already been accomplisht in his art. If he renounces the privilege of threading the narrow paths trodden by three or four of the most important and most individual of those who have carried the torch ahead, he must perforce walk in the broad road tramped by the less important and the less individual. He has to choose whether he will seek to follow the real leaders or be satisfied with the uninspired methods of the common herd who struggle aimlessly in the rear. When the conceit of immaturity prompts an ambitious youngster to the vain vaunt that he has not read the salient works of the great men, he

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is at once confronted by a dilemma—either he had to read the minor writings of the lesser men, or else he has read nothing at all. Imitation of some sort there must be. Why not get the best? And why seek prematurely for sharp originality, since that can be achieved in time only by the riper development of the artist's own personality? It is not by early audacities that a young man can affirm himself, but only by a patient acquisition of the traditional methods, which are the slow accumulation of inherited experience. As a French critic recently put it succinctly: "If you begin with the end, you are in danger of ending with the beginning; and if early works that are labored do not imply future mastery, early works that are masterly are the manifestation of an artist without personality."

The artist can be individual, he can have an accent of his own, he can separate himself from his fellows, only as his own personality manifests itself, which it is not apt to do in youth and which it cannot do until the artist has learnt his trade. Only by imitation can he acquire it; and imitation is therefore his duty,—independent imitation and not slavish copying. "It is a necessary and warrantable pride to disclaim to walk servilely behind any individual, however elevated his rank," said Sir Joshua Reynolds, with his customary common sense. "The true and liberal

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ground of imitation is an open field; where, tho he who precedes has had the advantage of starting before you, you may always purpose to overtake him; it is enough, however, to pursue his course; you need not tread in his footsteps, and you certainly have a right to outstrip him if you can."

Since true originality is the expression of one's own personality, it cannot wisely be sought for deliberately. It will reveal itself when it exists, and it cannot be forced. It must mature of its own accord. No man can, by taking thought, make an originality for himself. Lowell was as shrewd as usual when he asserted that "if a poet resolve to be original, it will end commonly in his being peculiar." And even the youngest of poets ought to be able to seize the difference between originality and peculiarity. It was not by straining for peculiarity that Milton made himself one of the most original of English poets, but by loving imitation of that one of his predecessors whom he most admired. "Milton was the poetical son of Spenser," so Dryden declared; "for we have our lineal descents and clans as well as other families." Then he added his direct testimony:—"Milton has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original." Tho Milton chose to confess the imitation of Spenser, it is easy for us to perceive now that he had also not a few other

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originals before him,—Sophocles and Vergil, Dante and Shakspere. As Stevenson said in his own confession, "Perhaps I hear some one cry out: But this is not the way to be original! It is not; nor is there any way but to be born so. Nor yet, if you are born original, is there anything in this training that shall clip the wings of your originality."

No authors have ultimately attained to a truer originality than Shakspere and Molière, an originality both of form and of content. Shakspere was able to give us at last the final model of modern tragedy, and Molière succeeded in perfecting the final model of modern comedy. If they had indulged in the delightful amusement of talking about themselves, they would both have avowed unhesitatingly that they also had been sedulous apes in their youthful years of authorship, when they were cautiously feeling their way and before they had come into their own. Molière's earliest pieces are so closely in accord with the tradition of the Italian comedy-of-masks that the 'Étourdi,' for example, might be held up for study as the finest specimen of this species. The Italians supplied him with a ready-made mold into which he could pour whatever he had of his own.

Shakspere started out also as an humble imitator, not of an exotic form such as tempted

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Molière, but of several specific predecessors in his own language. He was obviously unoriginal in his early pieces, even in 'Love's Labor's Lost,' almost the only play of his the actual source of which has not yet been discovered. In 'Love's Labor's Lost' he was imitating Lyly; in 'Titus Andronicus' he was imitating Kyd; in 'Richard II' he was imitating Marlowe. At first he played their game; they were his teachers then, altho he was soon able to beat them at it. In these 'prentice plays there is to be detected very little of his individuality; and we can catch in them only a faint premonition of the richer Shaksperian accent which was in time to characterize all that he put his hand to. They are not yet markt boldly with his image and superscription. They are the trial essays of a clever and ambitious young fellow, experimental and almost empty when compared with the certainty and the fulness of his riper works after he had found himself, after he had come into his own, and after he had amply developed his originality. And it was by the imitation of Lyly and Kyd and Marlowe that he taught himself how to tell a story on the stage. When his hour came he was ready to do loftier things than they had ever dared; but it was only by the aid of the weapons that he had wrested from their hands that he was able to vanquish them.

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Brunetière, to whom we owe the first serious attempt to study the evolution of the several literary species, comedy and tragedy, the novel and the lyric, maintained that these types were transmitted by direct imitation and that they were modified by deliberate refusal to imitate. Whereas Regnard and Marivaux and Beaumarchais continued the comedy of Molière, each of them adapting the tradition to his own need of self-expression, Racine wilfully reacted against the influence of Corneille and sought to make tragedy in certain of its manifestations exactly the opposite of what it had been in the hands of his mighty predecessor. So we can discern one explanation for the rigid skeleton of Ben Jonson's tragedies in his desire to depart from the looser Shaksperian formula; he was subject to its influence as fully as if he had accepted it instead of rejecting it violently. Racine and Jonson refused to do what their older contemporaries had been wont to do; indeed, they insisted on doing the very opposite. And altho this may seem like a denial of imitation, it is only another application of the principle.

Few attempts have been made to trace the long evolution of any single literary species in the whole course of English literature in both its branches, British and American; and quite the best of them is the admirable history of English

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tragedy for which we are indebted to Professor Thorndike. It is significant that his investigations have led him to a conclusion almost the same as Brunetière's. In his final chapter he calls attention to "the extraordinary force that imitation has exercised in the creation of tragedy. It seems, indeed, the generating power. Men are forever imitating, but they cannot imitate without change. In these changes, the variations due to environment,—personal, theatrical, literary, social,—arise the individual peculiarities, the beginnings of new species, the element of growth. . . . Destroy the faculty of imitation, and the generation of new forms would seem to be well-nigh impossible."

If this assertion is well founded,—and the more we study literary evolution the less likely we are to dispute it,—then imitation is not only the solid foundation for an ample development of any art, it is also the strict duty of every artist in the formative period of his career.

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THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

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V

THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

TWO things must be admitted in advance by all who adventure themselves in literary criticism. The first of these is that a work of art which has been praised by experts, and which has pleased long and pleased many, in all probability possesses qualities which justify its success,—or which at least explain this. And the second is that the most stimulating criticism is likely to spring from sympathetic appreciation, and that the criticism which has its root in antipathy is likely to be sterile. But even if both these things must be granted, it does not follow that adverse criticism, even of those whose fame may seem to be most solidly founded, is any the less useful. In every generation we have to revise the verdicts rendered by the generations that went before; and this is possible only when we are willing to reopen the case and to listen to fresh argument.

The result of these successive revaluations, century after century, is often very surprizing.

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Sometimes an author is unexpectedly raised aloft to an eminence which would have astonisht his contemporaries; and sometimes he is cast down from the exalted pinnacle to which his contemporaries had lifted him. Swift, for example, affected to forget even Defoe's name, alluding to him contemptuously as the man who had stood in the pillory; but posterity has seen fit to bestow on 'Robinson Crusoe' a reputation surpassing even that of 'Gulliver's Travels.' And however popular the 'Pilgrim's Progress' may have been with the plain people when it first appeared, probably no one of the men of letters of Bunyan's own time so much as suspected its abiding value. For nearly a century after it had been going thru edition after edition, 'Don Quixote' was curtly dismist as little better than a jest-book. On the other hand, Pope was esteemed by contemporary critics not only as indisputably the greatest poet of his own language and of his own time, but also the greatest poet who had ever written at any time in any language; and yet, less than a hundred years after his death, the real question was not whether he was a great poet, but whether he was justly entitled to be considered a poet at all. The admirers of the British bard saw his vaunted pre-eminence shrivel away, until there were few so poor to do him reverence. This revaluation was due to the slow dis-

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integration of an establisht reputation, in consequence of the steady pressure exerted by adverse criticism not intimidated by the prestige of an overwhelming vogue. And the adverse criticism, devoid of enthusiasm, indeed frankly hostile, bent on seeing the thing criticized as it really was, cannot be called sterile, offensive as it may have been to those ardent admirers of the disestablisht god who had resolutely refused to look at the clay feet of their idol.

Moreover, not a little of the eulogy bestowed even upon the mightiest names of the past is undiscriminating and therefore misleading and mischievous. These masters are often overpraised for what they did; and they are also praised for what they have never attempted. We find the careless critic assuming that because they are undeniably great, they are equally great in all aspects of their genius; and this is not true even of the foremost of them. It is doing an ill service to the masters to praise them in the wrong place and for the wrong reason. This midsummer madness of alleged criticism is perhaps most frequently discoverable in German attempts to illuminate Shakspere; but it is visible also in a large proportion of the lavish praise with which Scott and Dickens are continually besprinkled. Some critics seem to have a Parsee-like inability to see the spots on the sun they worship.

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Here we may profit by the example of the Roman Catholic Church, which keeps alive the honorable custom of adding to the number of the saints. From time to time it elects to this blessed company those holy men whose lives are a perpetual example. But it is characteristically shrewd in its procedure; and it has taken wise precautions to prevent its being imposed upon. It has guarded itself carefully against the danger of having unworthy men foisted into the glorious body of the beatified. Not satisfied with the popular belief that a man belongs to the noble army of martyrs and confessors, it insists that his admirers shall prove that he is truly worthy to be enrolled with the older saints. It has prescribed that a fair trial shall take place, and, as a rule, not until a half-century after the candidate's death; and it has ordained that an opposing counsel shall be appointed whose duty it is to bring up all that can be said against him. This officer of the court has the privilege of free speech; he is authorized to analize all the evidence presented by those who have proposed the beatification, and he is expected to do his best to prevent them from getting their saint unless they can make out a clear case. This useful functionary is known as the Devil's Advocate.

The duties of the Devil's Advocate may not always be pleasant for the official appointed to

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the post; but there is an obvious necessity that the task imposed on him should be undertaken by some one. And it is not only in the Church of Rome that the Devil's Advocate can render useful service. There is an unending demand for volunteers to fill this position in other than ecclesiastical affairs. The general acceptance of the maxim that we must not speak ill of the dead often leads us to be lazily satisfied with uttering pleasant commonplaces over the grave of a man whose influence has been evil, or who has wilfully neglected opportunities to do good. In literature, a similar feeling often prompts us to repeat complacently the praise which contemporaries may have bestowed upon a writer not wholly worthy of the manifold laudations he has received. As Dryden put it aptly in one of his epilogs,

> Fame then was cheap, and the first-comers sped;
> And they have kept it since by being dead.

Sometimes a writer may win an undue proportion of his fame merely by outliving all his rivals. Keats and Shelley, Musset and Poe, were all cut off untimely in their youth, whereas Voltaire and Goethe, Victor Hugo and Tennyson, were allowed more than the full plenitude of threescore years and ten. Perhaps some few of the laurels with which these octogenarians were

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crowned before death at last overtook them may have been bestowed as much out of reverence for their venerable estate as out of regard for their indisputable gifts. In Franklin's phrase, they obtruded themselves into the presence of posterity; and posterity was glad to pay them homage, partly because of sheer survivorship. They had each of them won the prize in the tontine of fame,—a prize denied to Shakspere, to Molière, and to Balzac, who were able to attain only to a little more than a half-century of life.

Voltaire once laid down the rule that if the devil should help us out of a hole, we are bound to say a good word for his horns. And if the Devil's Advocate shall aid us to a clearer perception of the emptiness of certain inflated reputations, common decency ought to make us refrain from damning his eyes. Indeed, if we discover the activity of the Devil's Advocate to be beneficent, we may, if we prefer, credit his good deed to a good motive, and we may refuse to believe that it was prompted by the Spirit of Evil. Perhaps we should go further and suggest that any search for his motive may be unnecessary, since his actions, like those of any other useful functionary, are to be judged properly by their results only.

That the Devil's Advocate is a useful functionary can be denied by no one who recognizes the

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danger to the cause of art when the practitioner of any craft is wantonly overpraised for what he actually did or wilfully belauded for what he failed to accomplish. For example, the unmixed eulogy of Shakspere, such as we find in Swinburne's exuberant peans, is positively harmful, since it tends to obscure the real merits of the victim of this dithyrambic rhapsody. By refusing to admit any possible deficiency in Shakspere, we deny ourselves the privilege and the pleasure of discerning the solid basis of his real superiority. Great as a poet, as a psychologist, as a philosophic commentator on life, Shakspere is great as a playwright only on occasion,—that is to say, in less than half of his dramas. In the other half he seems to have been satisfied to meet only the lax demands of the Elizabethan audiences. For us to be unwilling to confess the haphazard conduct of the sprawling plot in 'Cymbeline' and in the 'Winter's Tale' is not only to surrender ignominiously the right of criticism, it is also to debar ourselves from perceiving the masterly structure of 'Othello' and 'Hamlet.' It is a fact that Shakspere could be a playwright of surpassing skill whenever he chose to take the trouble to shape his material to best advantage; and it is also a fact that he did not always take this trouble. We cannot refuse our gratitude to the Devil's Advocate, if his protest

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against the slovenly plot-making of 'Cymbeline' opens our eyes to see more clearly the marvelous dexterity of the dramaturgy which Shakspere displayed in 'Othello.'

But this is only a part of the duty of the Devil's Advocate, this more exact estimating of the specific qualities which justify the fame of the great writers. Another part of his obligation is to press the embarrassing question whether certain writers are in very truth entitled to be termed great. There are not a few reputations which this generation has inherited from the generations that went before, and which we must needs examine for ourselves to make sure that the title-deeds are all that they pretend to be. And altho it will doubtless annoy many who are content to admire by tradition, the suggestion may be riskt that there is no task ready to the hand of the Devil's Advocate in these opening years of this twentieth century more pressing than an insistence upon the desirability of a fresh consideration of the claims of John Ruskin, of Thomas Carlyle, and of Samuel Johnson.

The position of these writers is almost unchallenged; they continue to be showered with superabundant praise; their works reappear in frequent editions; they profit unceasingly by past praise; and their admirers would be surprized if their right to exalted celebrity should be

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sharply challenged. That they have attained to the fame which they now enjoy is proof of their possession of undeniable qualities. For every reputation there must have been good reasons, of course; but the question for us is whether these reasons are valid for us now and today. There were reasons enough for the reputation of Pope in his time, and yet his fame is now sadly shrunken. Are the foundations for the reputation of Johnson, of Carlyle, and of Ruskin really as solidly buttrest as the foundation of the reputation of Pope? The actual merits of Pope, his wit, his verbal adroitness, his consummate craftsmanship as a versifier according to the code accepted in his own day,—these are all acknowledged now, perhaps more adequately than ever before; and yet his glory is diminisht. Have we any cause to suspect that the glory of Carlyle and of Ruskin and of Johnson will also be dimmed, even if they continue to command respect for humbler qualities than those with which they are now carelessly credited?

Certainly the Devil's Advocate will have his work laid out for him when he undertakes to dispute Ruskin's right to the reputation that is now allotted to him. That Ruskin was a great writer, in the narrower meaning of the word, is indisputable. He was a master-rhetorician. We may relish his style or we may detest it; but

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there is no denying that he had a style. He possest what Shakspere called "an exchequer of words." Stevenson credited him with a "large declamatory and controversial eloquence." But John La Farge pointed out that his "use of phraseology that continually recalls to us the forms of the Bible or of the sermon-writer" gradually hypnotizes us until "we begin to believe that beneath such words there must be some graver message than could be contained in forms of ordinary speech: indeed, the use of clear, ordinary speech would have made many of his appeals collapse in ridicule." Mr. Henry James has made it plain that Ruskin's abundant writing about art fails totally to bring out the fact that "Art, after all, is made for us, and not we for art"; and the same writer goes on to say that as to Ruskin's world of art "being a place where we may take life easily, wo to the luckless mortal who enters it with any such disposition; instead of a garden of delight, he finds a sort of assize-court in perpetual session."

It may be claimed that even if Ruskin's theories of pictorial art are now as discredited as Pope's theories of poetry, he is still an inspiring critic in the supreme art of the conduct of life, since he contributed powerfully to the solution of the pressing problems of society. But here the Devil's Advocate would summon other wit-

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nesses, as competent in this field as La Farge and Mr. James in the field of pictorial art. Lord Avebury, for one, has asserted that while Ruskin's writings on these subjects "are admirable as guides to conduct and thoroly Christian in spirit," to treat them "as principles of political economy is to confuse two totally different things," since "tables of weights and measures are not condemned as cold and heartless because some people have not enough to eat; and to alter the size of the bushel will not increase the supply of food." And it is a fact, whatever its significance, that Ruskin's contributions to economic theory have been brusht aside by nearly all serious students of social conditions with the same contempt displayed by painters and architects toward his contributions to the theory of the fine arts. It is perhaps not too much to say that those who are most intimately acquainted with these subjects hold that altho Ruskin could talk beautifully, he did not know what he was talking about.

Lord Avebury, it will be noted, declared that Ruskin's writings were thoroly Christian in spirit. And here is where the last stand is likely to be made by the ardent admirers of Ruskin. For example, Charles Eliot Norton asserted his conviction that "no other master of literature in our time endeavored more earnestly and steadily

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to set forth, for the help of those he addrest, whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report." When we read praise like this we can hardly believe our eyes, since Ruskin, in a very large part of his writings, was notoriously querulous and scornful. It is difficult to discover the Christian virtue of humility in a writer who degenerated into little better than a common scold. The Devil's Advocate will have no difficulty in showing that arrogance was as characteristic of Ruskin's attitude as shrieking was characteristic of his utterance. With all his devotion to truth (as his own narrow vision revealed this to him), Ruskin was wholly devoid of tolerance; and, as Lord Morley has told us, "tolerance means reverence for all the possibilities of Truth; it means acknowledgment that she dwells in divers mansions and wears vesture of many colors, and speaks strange tongues . . . it means the charity that is greater even than faith and hope." Can even the most devoted admirer of Ruskin claim that he was dowered with the essential Christian virtues of faith and hope and charity?

After all, it is not too much to insist that a good Christian ought to have good manners. He ought to possess his soul in patience; to control his temper; and to show at least a little loving-kindness. He ought to be a gentleman,

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in the best meaning of that abused word,—a word frequent in Ruskin's mouth, altho the qualities it denotes were as frequently absent from his works. And the Devil's Advocate could read to the court many a passage from Ruskin's writings which would prove that he had very bad manners, and that they were rooted in a belligerent self-esteem and in an offensive disregard for the feelings of others. No doubt, the Devil's Advocate might feel it to be his duty also to offer in evidence those other pages in which Ruskin reveled in violent eccentricities of thought, and in which he complacently displayed his assumption of special knowledge in departments of learning wherein he was profoundly ignorant. Of course, the counsel for the defense would then read to the court extracts in which the nobler side of Ruskin's nature revealed itself, and in which the exuberant rhetoric was sustained by clear thinking and by kindly feeling.

When the case against Ruskin has been argued the Devil's Advocate will turn to the case against Carlyle; and he will be able to bring forward a host of witnesses to prove that Carlyle was curiously like Ruskin in his bad manners, in his intolerant contempt, and in his overweening self-conceit. The most impressive of these witnesses will be Carlyle himself, who shrank from

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no self-revelation of his selfish disregard for his fellow human beings. Carlyle was unforgivably contemptible in his reference to Charles Lamb, a far nobler character than himself. He defended Eyre, the brutal governor; and he sneered at Howard, the prison-reformer. He had the infelicity of being wrong-headed on the wrong side; he saw no harm in slavery; and he boasted that he longed "to get his knife into George Washington." He became bitterly jealous of Emerson, to whom he was under obligation for money at a time when money was most welcome to him. There was envious condescension in his remark to Colonel Higginson that Emerson thought "everybody in the world as good as himself." Certainly Carlyle made sure that nobody could ever truthfully make a similar remark about him. If the Devil's Advocate has the courage of his convictions, he may be moved to insinuate that envy is the keynote of Carlyle's character, the mean envy of a peasant conscious of great gifts yet uneasy in the company of those better graced than himself. This envy prompted his self-consciousness to self-display, in total disregard of the society in which he found himself. Galton met him at the Ashburtons' and thought him "the greatest bore that a house could tolerate," "raving against degeneracy without any facts in justification, and contributing nothing to

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the information or pleasure of the company." In his writings Carlyle revealed the same failings as in his conduct. He treated the statesmen of the French Revolution with an insular insolence which is as unpleasant as it is unjustifiable. He was ill at ease in his century, since he was wholly out of sympathy with its two most salient characteristics—the democratic movement and the scientific spirit. His work was essentially negative and destructive; a man might learn from him what to hate, but never what to love. His political philosophy, with its reliance upon an inspired dictator, a man on horseback, is a blatant anachronism discredited long before Carlyle was born. And he was absurdly inconsistent in his own practice; as it has been put pithily, "he preacht the doctrine of silence in forty volumes." He pretended to despise mere words, yet he was himself essentially a phrase-maker.

The counsel for the defense will dwell upon his honest hard work and upon his loyal labor. He may call to the stand a fellow-historian, Lecky, who once made bold to assert that "in all that vast mass of literature which Carlyle has bequeathed to us there is no scampt work, and every competent judge has recognized the untiring and conscientious accuracy with which he has verified and sifted the minutest fact." But the Devil's Advocate will promptly put on the

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stand one of these competent judges, Professor Morse Stephens, who has recorded how Carlyle wilfully neglected the enormous collection of French Revolutionary pamphlets in the British Museum. These documents are absolutely essential to a full understanding of those troublous times; but Carlyle refused to profit by them simply because the authorities of the library declined to set aside a special room for him to consult them in. Perhaps it is because he wantonly ignored these sources of information that Carlyle's 'French Revolution,' with all its gleams of genius and its flashes of insight, is as fantastic as it is—a nightmare of history.

His style is as individual as it is indefensible. It was deliberately adapted for effect; and if it is judged by its results, it has had pernicious consequences, misleading many who lackt Carlyle's great powers into a morass of violent verbiage. There is significance in the remark of Landor that Carlyle made a few ideas go further than any one had ever done before; and there is special shrewdness in the suggestion which Landor added: "If you see a heap of books thrown on the floor, they look ten times as many as when orderly on the shelf."

When he undertakes the case of Samuel Johnson the Devil's Advocate will have the easiest task of the three. The works of Ruskin and

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of Carlyle survive and are still abundantly read, whereas the works of Johnson, even if reprinted from time to time, remain almost unread except by special students. The general public may know Johnson himself, but not from his own writings. He survives now only by what another man wrote about him. Without Boswell, Johnson's fame would have shriveled long ago. His authority as a critic—and it is only as a critic that he has any claim to authority—is now thoroly discredited. Nearly a century ago, Hazlitt declared that "it is the establisht rule at present to speak highly of the doctor's authority and to dissent from almost every one of his critical decisions." How inept these decisions were may be judged from his remark to Miss Seward that he would "hang a dog that would read 'Lycidas' twice." And when she askt what would become of her, who read and reread Milton's lovely lyric with a delight "which grows by what it feeds on," he returned the surly answer that she might die "in a surfeit of bad taste." And his critical decisions on Shakspere are often only a little less absurd than his judgments on Milton.

In his conversation, as in his writing, Johnson delighted in displaying the same trampling arrogance that we discover also in Ruskin and in Carlyle. He boasted that "to treat your op-

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ponent with respect is to give him an advantage to which he is not entitled";—and perhaps he never made any remark more characteristic of his underbred narrow-mindedness. This boast he made good not only in his conversation but also in his writing, both literary and political. It was exemplified in 'Taxation no Tyranny,' the partizan pamphlet he composed in return for the pension bestowed on him by George III, a king after his own heart. His political principles were as arbitrary as his literary opinions; and today they are equally discredited. In his own time Gibbon saw thru him and described him (in one of the notes of the 'Decline and Fall') as having "a bigoted tho vigorous mind, greedy of every pretence to hate and persecute those who dissent from his creed."

His style, which was once widely admired, long exerted an evil influence upon English literature. It was as artificial and as demoralizing as the style of Carlyle. Only a little while after Johnson died, Coleridge had asserted that "the antithesis of Johnson is rarely more than verbal." It was a pretentious and inflated kind of writing, which had at least the merit of being in consonance with the character of the writer. Never was this style displayed to less advantage than in the 'Idler' and the 'Rambler,' since the essay (as Steele and Addison had perfected it)

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called for lightness and swiftness, unflagging variety and unforced ease,—qualities Johnson was devoid of, even if he did not consciously eschew them.

That Johnson had common sense of a heavy-handed sort, that he had a piercing but limited insight into human nature, that he showed a sturdy manliness under misfortune,—these things the Devil's Advocate will acknowledge ungrudgingly. But the counsel for the defense will have to admit also a host of deficiencies of character,—that Johnson was on occasion harsh and brutal, that he used his strength often to crush down the weak, that he was a wretched glutton, and that he was pitiably superstitious. "We must measure the glory of authors by the number of those who benefit by their works," said Nisard. If we apply this measurement to Johnson, his glory is seen to be miserably diminisht, since an author's works can benefit only those by whom they are read.

But the Devil's Advocate can be trusted to handle his own case in due season. He will speak for himself, and he will call many witnesses; some of those he will put upon the stand may break down under cross-examination, and it may be that he himself will overindulge in the privilege of special pleading. Yet, after all, he may turn out to be like his master—not so black

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as he is painted. The sooner he is able to prepare his case against those three candidates for literary beatification the better, let the result of the several trials be what it may. We cannot find out too soon whether or not Johnson and Carlyle and Ruskin are truly entitled to be lifted aloft to the side of Lessing, for whom Goethe and Schiller once composed in collaboration an epigram-epitaph:

> Living we honored thee, loved thee; we set thee among the immortals;
> Dead, and thy spirit still reigns o'er the spirits of men.

(1910.)

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LITERARY CRITICISM AND BOOK-REVIEWING

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VI

LITERARY CRITICISM AND BOOK-REVIEWING

MANKIND has a marvelous facility for self-repetition, as tho it was resolved to keep on proving that to-morrow is like unto yesterday. Even history is prone to plagiarize from itself at whatever interval of time; and many an American, reading about General Buller's obstinate blundering on the Tugela, could not help feeling that Braddock had been defeated once again. The world moves, of course; and yet we go on saying ditto to our grandfathers in the placid belief that we are declaring new truths.

Just at the beginning of the new century the new truth which certain strenuous writers are shrilly declaring is that literature is suffering from a lack of criticism, that there are now none to uphold the final standards of literary art and to apply them inexorably, and that, therefore, the republic of letters is in a parlous state, with incompetent mediocrity claiming all the rewards of merit and usurping all the places of honor. One of these robust protestants against the prevailing

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laxity of criticism, the British author of a chance collection of 'Ephemera Critica,' laments that belles-lettres are sinking deeper and deeper into degradation; and two American reviewers are in painful accord with him, the first asserting that "one grows weary, in these days, of harping persistingly upon the melancholy fact that criticism in the Anglo-Saxon world has become almost extinct and that what the public accepts as criticism is almost anything but that," while the second complacently confesses that "the degradation of literature is one of the facts of the present day impossible to ignore." And all three of these writers unite in crying aloud for a criticism which shall scourge and scorch the feeble folk now enjoying the favor of the public and which shall drive the money-changers from out the temple of art.

This cry not only finds a prompt response in that gorilla-delight at the prospect of seeing somebody else suffer which still works in not a few of us, but it also awakens an echo in the breasts of many milder lovers of literature, justly annoyed by the prevalence of flagrant puffery and by the silly exaltation of the novels of the hour which are ever achieving a vogue sadly out of proportion to their actual value. No doubt, it must be very irritating to those whose sense of proportion is keener than their sense-of-humor,

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to read in the hasty reviews that fill the daily and the weekly papers that this or that callow story-teller has really rivaled Thackeray or Hawthorne, and that one of the minor choir of latter-day songsters combines in his verses the luscious beauty of Keats with the penetrative imagination of Wordsworth.

But, however understandable it is that men should be provoked to wrath by absurdities like these, there is no basis for the belief that the present conditions, lamentable as they may seem to some, are in any way new. It is more than fifty years since Poe died; and Poe was as vehement as any of the protestants of to-day in declaring the decadence of contemporary literature and in asserting the necessity for a criticism which should be as rigorous as it was vigorous. And it is more than seventy years since Macaulay gave utterance to the same opinions, asserting that "however contemptible a poem or a novel may be, there is not the least difficulty in procuring favorable notices of it from all sorts of publications, daily, weekly or monthly." Macaulay went on to maintain that the influence of puffery was most pernicious, since "it is no small evil that the avenues of fame should be blocked up by a swarm of noisy, pushing, elbowing pretenders, who, tho they will not be able to make good their own entrance, hinder in the

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meantime those who have a right to enter." Now, even if the present state of affairs is most deplorable, there is at least consolation in the knowledge that we have not fallen from the high estate of our ancestors. Indeed, we may even take comfort in the thought that, if the same puffery existed in Poe's time and in Macaulay's, perhaps it may not be so fatal to literature as those two incisive writers asserted. We may perhaps go further and surmise that if literature really flourished fifty years ago and seventy years ago, as we know that it did, altho the book-reviewers were doing their duty no better then than they are doing it now, perhaps the vigorous and rigorous criticism of the sort that Macaulay and Poe preached—and that they both on occasion practised—is not quite so necessary as they declared it to be.

Behind the somewhat exacerbated protest of Macaulay and Poe and of the strenuous writers of our own day who voice the same dissatisfaction, there lies a threefold assumption:—first, that it is the chief duty of the critic to tear the mask from impostors and to rid the earth of the incompetent; second, that the critics of the past accepted this obligation and were successful in its accomplishment; and third, that there is today at the beginning of the twentieth century a special need for this corrective criticism. Yet these

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three assumptions are assumptions only; not one of them is borne out by the history of literature. But, altho unsupported by the facts, they are so plausible that they are likely to mislead and to create a misunderstanding as to the true function of criticism.

It may be an obligation upon the critic of science to tear the mask from off the impostor; but this can never be a chief duty for the critic of art. In so far as literature touches science—in biography, for example, and in the other departments of history—the utmost exactness of statement must be insisted upon. But in so far as literature is an art, in pure belles-lettres, in poetry, in the drama, in prose-fiction, there are no standards of scientific exactness to be applied with scientific rigidity. When the critic is unfortunately seized with the belief that there are such standards and that these standards are in his possession, to be applied at will, the result is Jeffrey's famous condemnation of Wordsworth and the infamous assault on Keats—two instances without much encouragement for the critic who may feel moved to volunteer for police work.

Nor is there any better warrant for the second of these three assumptions—that the critics of the past accepted the obligation of taking pretenders to the police-station, while the critics of the present are derelict to their duty, preferring rather to

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close their eyes when they perceive incompetent poets and unworthy romancers picking the pockets of the unsuspecting public. It is true that certain of the self-styled critics of the past devoted themselves to the exposure of literary malefactors, but the result of their labors was often only a pitiful self-exposure. Jeffrey, of the *Edinburgh*, and Wilson, of *Blackwood's*, abounded in scathing contempt of the books they did not like. When they were wrong, as not infrequently happened, they merely made themselves laughing-stocks for all who have come after; and when they were right, as might be the case now and again, they had plainly wasted their time, since they had done no more than kill what had no real vitality.

When we note that no one of the leading critics of the nineteenth century—Sainte-Beuve, Arnold or Lowell—cared keenly for the discussion of contemporary literature, we are led to remark that there is a necessary distinction to be made between criticism, as they practised it, and mere book-reviewing. Criticism, in their hands and in the hands of those who follow them, is a department of literature, while book-reviewing is a branch of journalism. To "get the best" is the aim of literature, while the object of journalism is rather to "get the news." The critic, concerning himself especially with what is most

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worthy of his inquiry, is led most often to discuss the picked works bequeathed to us by the past, while the book-reviewer, writing for a periodical, has perforce to deal with the average product of the present. Criticism is the art of "seeing the object as in itself it really is," so Matthew Arnold told us; and it "obeys an instinct prompting it to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world." Book-reviewing, however useful it may be, has a far humbler function; it may be defined as the art of informing readers just what the latest volume is, in kind, in character, and in quality.

Criticism can, if it so choose, deal only with the permanent past, while book-reviewing has no option; it must consider the fleeting present. Book-reviewing has for its staple topic the contemporary—which is very likely to be little better than temporary; and it is, therefore, at liberty to relax its requirements and to apply standards that are immediate rather than permanent—to contrast one novelist of our time with another novelist of our time rather than to crush both of them under a comparison with the mighty masters of the past. It would be absurd for a book-reviewer to feel forced always to condemn every new volume of short-stories because the young writers are obviously inferior in force and in finish to Poe and to Hawthorne, or to banish every one of the nov-

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elists who are seeking to set forth the seething life of the huge and sprawling metropolis of America because these ardent novices lack not a little of the genius we are all glad to acknowledge in Balzac and in Thackeray.

It is not with the present condition of criticism (in this narrower sense of the word) that the strenuous writers are dissatisfied, but rather with the present condition of book-reviewing as revealed in our periodicals, daily, weekly, and monthly. They proclaim that contemporary literature is languishing because the book-reviewer has failed to do what in him lies; and they insist that book-reviewing is no longer what it was once. Of course, it is easy enough to find fault with the book-reviewing of to-day as it is visible in the countless periodicals of Great Britain and the United States; indeed, there are few institutions with which it is not easy to find fault. Both in London and in New York book-reviewing is often careless; it is often incompetent; it is frequently casual and hasty; and only very rarely it is venal. It is sometimes careful, competent, thorô and disinterested. It is sometimes merely the medium for the selfish display of what the young writer is pleased to consider as his wit. It is sometimes both intelligent and conscientious.

In the daily and weekly periodicals of England

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and America book-reviewing is perhaps rather better on the whole than is the reviewing in these periodicals of the fine arts, of music, and of the drama—altho this apparent superiority is probably due to the greater inherent difficulty of the other tasks. Book-reviewing, again, is rather better on the whole at the beginning of the twentieth century than it ever was before. Whoever has considered the career of Oliver Goldsmith can recall the wretched condition of book-reviewing in England in the middle of the eighteenth century, when it was wholly in the control of the booksellers; and whoever is familiar with the correspondence of Rufus Griswold will remember what an extraordinary state of affairs seems to have existed in the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century, when an editor was apparently considered churlish if he refused to publish the reviews of their books sent to him by the authors themselves. In fact, only those who are really ignorant about book-reviewing in the past would venture to pretend that it was in any way superior to book-reviewing in the present.

Probably this pretense is to be ascribed partly to our ingrained belief that things used to be far better than they are now. We know well enough that this is not true; but still we often talk as tho we thought the world was always running down

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hill. The deficiencies of book-reviewing are serious enough now; but there never was a time when they were any less evident. There never was a time when book-reviewing was all that it ought to be, or even when its average was high. Indeed, we may go further and say that there never was a periodical, British or American, French or German, in which the book-reviewing was always satisfactory—in which it was unfailingly competent, courteous, and disinterested—and in which every article was evidently written by a gentleman and a scholar. At least, if there is any such periodical in existence, I should be glad to subscribe for it at once; and if it is no longer in existence, I should be glad to buy a complete set. Moreover, I should be willing to pay an honest reward merely for the disclosure of its name, since such a periodical is what I have been seeking diligently for now many years.

In my leisurely youth, when I had all the time there was, I bought a forty-year file of a London weekly of lofty pretensions and of a certain antiquity, since it has now existed for more than threescore years and ten; and in the course of a twelvemonth I turned every page of those solid tomes, not reading every line, of course, but not neglecting a single number. The book-reviewing was painfully uninspired, with little brilliancy in expression and with little in-

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sight in appreciation; it was disfigured by a certain smug complacency which I find to be still a characteristic of the paper whenever I chance now to glance at its pages. But as I worked thru this contemporary record of the unrolling of British literature from 1830 to 1870, what was most surprizing was the fact that only infrequently indeed did the book-reviewers bestow full praise on the successive publications which we now hold to be among the chief glories of the Victorian reign, and that the books most lavishly eulogized were often those that have now sunk into oblivion.

Of course, this surprize was a little unreasonable. The high value of the greater books of this period lies partly in their possession of the element of the universal and the permanent; and by the very fact of their having this element these books were so much the less in accord with the prevailing taste at the moment of their appearance; and the book-reviewer, being a journalist, and, therefore, professionally responsive to the immediately contemporary, discovered a closer conformity to this fleeting standard in other books now neglected, largely because taste has changed with the passing of the moment. Moreover, there is in the greater books of any era not only this element of universality and permanence, but also an element of individuality

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often very disconcerting to those into whose hands it first comes. They do not know quite what to make of it or how to take it. They can see that it fails to fit inside any of the accepted formulas, and this arouses doubt; for the healthy conservatism of mankind makes us distrust anything that seems to savor of overt originality.

It is, indeed, a commonplace of criticism that many a great artist has had to create the taste he is to satisfy, and that he has had to educate his public to appreciate him. The more original he is, the more individual his expression of life, the harder the task before him. No wonder is it, therefore, that what is written in accord with the conventions of the present and with the traditions of the past is more likely to call forth chants of praise from the book-reviewer than what happens to be bristling with an unexpected personality. Even if the book-reviewer himself has enjoyed the reading of the work in which a new thing is said in a new way, when he takes up his pen to comment upon it his conservatism often restrains him from the ample expression of his pleasure.

The third assumption of the strenuous writers is that there is a special need now at the beginning of the twentieth century for a fearless and trenchant criticism which shall relieve us somehow from the immense increase in the number

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of inferior books pouring from the presses. It may be asserted at once that this assumption has no firmer foundation than the two others. It is true that there are more books published nowadays than ever before, and that a very large proportion of them are worthless. But then a very large proportion of the books published in any decade of the nineteenth century or of the eighteenth century or of the seventeenth century are also worthless. The worthy books of these centuries are still remembered, while the worthless books were soon forgotten. It is a well-known fact that the telegraph poles seem closer together the more distant they are; and so it is also with the masterpieces of literature. To suppose that ours is the only decade that has suffered by the over-multiplication of needless books ought not to be possible to a scholar who knows the history of his own literature.

Perhaps it is also a little unscientific even to allow that we are suffering from an over-multiplication of books. It is possibly better to admit that the conditions of sound literary development require that there should be abundant and luxuriant productivity. It augurs well for the future of our literature that so many are now striving for self-expression in this medium, however annoying it may be to the book-reviewer to be forced to consider an ever-increasing number of

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volumes piled high on his table and however much it may irk him to waste time in commenting upon writers who seem to him to be beneath criticism. Any increase in the number of books points to a probable increase in the number of good books—unless, indeed, there has been some sudden relaxing in the fiber of the stock that speaks our language, some strange loss of energy in the race.

As a matter of fact, we find in the last decade of the past century a very large number of very poor books, wholly unworthy of publication, useless for any purpose. But we also find more often than ever before books that attain a high average of substance and of style. Never before were the principles of literary art so widely understood or so skilfully applied. Never before was technic more masterly or craftsmanship more accomplished. Never before were there so many writers of indisputable talent. Whether or not we have now our full share of writers of genius is another question; but it is a question to which this decade cannot furnish an answer, nor the next either. Genius can be tested only by the touchstone of time. Genius is for posterity to proclaim. The more frequent the men of talent among us to-day, the more likely it is that some one of them will be recognized as a man of genius to-morrow. Our perspective is far too

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short for us to gage the stature of genius. We are in the underbrush and we cannot make sure which of the tall trees is really the loftiest. On his ability to achieve this impossibility many a critic has staked his reputation—and lost it.

The aim of book-reviewing is to engage in discussion of our contemporaries, and this is why book-reviewing, which is a department of journalism, must be carefully distinguished from criticism, which is a department of literature. This is why also we need not worry ourselves overmuch about the present condition of book-reviewing, since it has not all the importance which the British author of 'Ephemera Critica' has claimed for it and since it can really have very little influence upon the future of literature. As a fact, the condition of book-reviewing is not now so lamentable as the British author has declared, and it is not indeed really worse than it was in earlier years; but it might be very much worse than it is, and very much worse than it ever was, without its having any unfortunate influence on the development of a single man of genius. Indeed, genius never more surely reveals itself as genius than in its ability to withstand the pressure of contemporary fashion and go on doing its own work in its own way.

On the author of genius the book-reviewers can have little influence, fortunate or unfortunate;

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and even on the author of talent their influence is at best but indirect. In other words, the book-reviewers wholly misconceive their position when they suppose themselves to have any special duty toward the author, since his work must of necessity be finished and out of hand before they can see it. As we look over the literary history of the nineteenth century, we can discover no single instance of any book-reviewer ever having exerted any influence, favorable or unfavorable, on any author of ability, either British or American. It is to the reader, and to the reader only, that the book-reviewers are under obligation. It is to the reader that they have to render their reports, honestly declaring what manner of book it may be they have before them, and devoting themselves wholly to such explanation and discussion as will interest and instruct the reader. They need take no thought whatever of the author, whose merits and demerits they are to investigate and declare, not for his sake—for it is then too late for him to profit by any advice of theirs—but for the sake of the reader. One evidence of the improvement of this branch of journalism is to be seen in the gradual disappearance of the old-school book-reviewers whose attitude toward an author was often that of a querulous pedagog, now giving him a good mark and now scolding him and bidding him stand in the corner for a

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dunce. The book-reviewers of the better class, nowadays, pretend to no responsibility for the author and deal with him quite impersonally; they are well aware that any influence they can exert upon him must be indirect only and thru the pressure of public opinion. They recognize that their duty is to the reader only and that their sole means of benefiting literature is by arousing in the public at large a distaste for the affected and the false, a disgust for the sham and the shoddy, a regard and respect for the sincere and honest treatment of life.

The British author of 'Ephemera Critica,' followed by the American writers who have echoed his plaints, would apparently like to have the book-reviewers resume the pedagogic attitude they have so wisely abandoned. He seems to believe that they are charged with grave responsibilities, having the duty of keeping the weights and the measures and of detecting counterfeit currency. He tells us that the critics of science accept this charge and acquit themselves loyally of this obligation; and he insists that the same burden should rest also upon the critics of belles-lettres—in other words, upon the book-reviewers. Behind this contention there is a misconception of the power of criticism and a mistaking of its boundaries; there is an assumption of aristocratic superiority not warranted by the facts of literary

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history. It is founded on the belief that literature is for the few rather than for the many and that the plain people are pitifully unable to appreciate what is best unless they are led to it by the critic and the scholar. This belief is rarely frankly stated, but it is held by many men of letters; it is exprest superabundantly in the pages of the Goncourts' 'Journal,' for example.

But this belief can have for its foundation only the opinion that what is most important in any art is its form, and not its content; and that literature itself is rather a matter of words and of phrases than a question of thought and of feeling. It is based on the theory that the substance is of less consequence than the style and that the technic is more vital than the idea. The plain people care little for technic, for style, for mere words and phrases; they are perhaps unduly impatient at the frequent discussion of these qualities by the literary experts. Altho they are not so negligent of manner as many assert, they give their chief attention to the matter in hand. They are ready always to respond to emotion and to thought; and in this they are capable of rising to unexpected heights.

The reputation of the great poets has not been made by the scholarly critics chiefly, but rather by the plain people of their own time or of the years immediately following. Almost every one of the commanding names in literature belongs

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to a man who enjoyed a wide popularity while he was alive. Sophocles was not only the most powerful but also the most applauded of Greek dramatists. Shakspere was the favorite of the groundlings who flocked to the Globe Theater; and Molière's plays drew large audiences oftener than those of any of his rivals. Goethe's lyrics were on the lips of the young men and maidens of Germany while he was yet alive in Weimar. Among the lyceum audiences of New England, in the middle of the nineteenth century, no lecturer was more welcome than Emerson.

Many a third-rate poet, failing of popular appreciation, altho praised by his fellow-men of letters, has placed his hope in after ages, when the taste of the people might be more cultivated, and has, therefore, filed an appeal to posterity. But there is no case on record where posterity has heard the appeal and reversed the unfavorable verdict of the plain people of the author's own time. If popularity is not obtained within the author's lifetime, or within threescore years and ten after his birth, it is never obtained at all. When the contemporary judgment of the broad public is unfavorable, it is final; and there is no recourse to any later tribunal. On the other hand, when this contemporary judgment is favorable, it is not final; and often the cause is reargued in every succeeding century.

In other words, the next generation will select

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out of the many popular authors of this generation the few that it will esteem worthy of survival; but it will never attempt to galvanize into life any of the unpopular authors. In fact, in the history of every truly great writer's reputation we can observe that he was relished by the plain people of his own day, whether or not he was adequately appreciated by the scholarly critics who were his contemporaries. More than one truly great writer has past thru this life amusing or consoling his fellow-men; and he has then died before the scholarly critics ever began to surmise that he was really deserving of their respectful attention. Cervantes certainly was one of these favorites of the plain people, unrecognized by the literary experts of his own tongue; and probably Shakspere was another. Not a few of the novelists widely read at the beginning of the twentieth century will be absolutely forgotten at the end of it; but, on the other hand, such of our writers of fiction as may be enjoyed at the end of the century will have been selected by the unerring hand of Time from the list of those known to-day wherever the English language is spoken.

This may seem to some a hazardous contention, altho it is borne out by the facts of literary history; and it is absolutely fatal to any theory that criticism has the power to pass upon

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the credentials of contemporary poets and romancers. This theory is essentially aristocratic; it sets up a caste of culture as the only one qualified to decide what is good or bad in literature. Upon questions of style, of form, of rhetoric, of construction, of art in general, this aristocracy of education is often the best judge, but in considering the essence of literature, the vital qualities to be felt rather than to be formulated, the life of the spirit, its judgment is not so good as that of the plain people, who know what they like altho they do not know why. The plain people took to heart the 'Pilgrim's Progress' long before the cultivated caste discovered its worth; and they thrilled to the Gettysburg address as it fell from the lips of the homely speaker.

The aristocrats of culture put their trust in academic standards, as becomes the custodians of tradition. They look to the past only; they rarely understand the present; they are prone to distrust the future. They did not perceive the scope of 'Don Quixote,' of 'Hamlet,' of the 'Cid,' and of the 'Femmes Savantes.' They were outraged by Hugo's 'Hernani' as they were disgusted with Ibsen's 'Ghosts.' They are rarely open-minded enough to disentangle what is praiseworthy out of the powerful works which revolt them—Zola's, for example, and Whitman's. But it is only fair to suggest that they are swift to

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belaud delicate art and technical skill. They found it easy to appreciate Vergil and Racine, Gray and Longfellow, and in general any other poet who has felt himself to be the heir of the ages and who has walked reverently in the footprints of his predecessors. They are, therefore, more likely to be right in their opinions on authors of the second rank than in their judgments upon original geniuses. In this latter task their very education seems often to be a disadvantage, sophisticating their perceptions and leaving them less ready to understand the elemental and the universal than the plain people are. It may even lead them to distrust a writer of primitive force, chiefly because the plain people like him.

The book-reviewers are wise in rejecting the advice of the strenuous writers quoted early in this paper and in not being tempted to take themselves too seriously. It is enough to give them pause to recall the fate of more than one of their predecessors and to remember that when a book-reviewer decides that it is his duty to scourge the incompetent and to drive out the false pretenders, he may be clever enough to select Robert Montgomery as his victim, or he may be unlucky enough to happen upon Byron or Keats or Wordsworth.

(1902.)

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FAMILIAR VERSE

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VII

FAMILIAR VERSE

I

"FAMILIAR VERSE" is the apt term Cowper chose to use in describing the lyric of commingled sentiment and playfulness which is more generally and more carelessly called *vers de société*. The lyric of this sort is less emotional, or less expansive, than the regular lyric; and it seeks to veil the depth of its feeling behind a debonair assumption of gaiety. In fact its feeling must not be deep, since it is the exact opposite of the poetry of genuine inspiration. It cannot deal with the profounder passions, and "its light touch," so Bagehot declares, "is not competent to express eager, intense emotion." Familiar verse is in poetry closely akin to what in prose is known as the "eighteenth-century essay"; Prior and Gay were early representatives of the one, as Steele and Addison were the creators of the other. Familiar verse is a far better designation than *vers de société* for two reasons: first, because the use of a French phrase might seem

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to imply that these witty and graceful poems are more abundant in French literature than in English,—which is not the fact; and second, because, however light and bright these lyrics may be, they are not mere society-verses, with only the glitter and the emptiness of the fashionable parade. They are not the idle amusement of those

> Who tread with jaded step the weary mill—
> Grind at the wheel, and call it "pleasure" still;
> Gay without mirth, fatigued without employ,
> Slaves to the joyless phantom of a joy.

No doubt, social verse should have polish, and finish, and the well-bred ease of the man of the world; but it ought also to carry a suggestion at least of the more serious aspects of life. It should not be frothily frivolous or coldly cynical, any more than it should be broadly comic or boisterously funny. It is at liberty to hint at hidden tears, even when it seems to be wreathed in smiles. It has no right to parade mere cleverness; and it must shun all affectation, as it must avoid all self-consciousness. It should appear to possess a colloquial carelessness which is ever shrinking from the commonplace, and which has succeeded in concealing every trace of that labor of the literary artist by which alone it has attained its seemingly spontaneous perfection.

"Familiar verse" is perhaps somewhat more exact than the term once employed by Mr. Sted-

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man,—"patrician rimes," which is a designation possibly a little chilly for these airy lyrics. To fall fully within the definition, so the late Frederick Locker-Lampson asserted, a poem must be brief and brilliant; and the younger Tom Hood added that it ought also to be buoyant. Brevity, brilliancy, buoyancy,—these are qualities we cannot fail to find in the best of Locker-Lampson's own verses, in Praed's, in Prior's,—and also in Holmes's, in Lowell's and in Bret Harte's.

Brevity it must have first of all; and Locker-Lampson excluded the 'Rape of the Lock' "on account of its length, which renders it much too important," altho it "would otherwise be one of the finest specimens of *vers de société* in any language." Here it is permissible to echo the opinion of Poe, who held that a poem could scarcely exceed one hundred lines in length under penalty of losing its unity of impression. But on the other hand, the poem of this species must not be excessively condensed, or else it is not important enough. A couplet does not give room to turn around in. Gay's

> Life is a jest, and all things show it;
> I said so once, and now I know it,

and Pope's

> I am his Highness's dog at Kew.
> Pray, sir, tell me,—whose dog are you?

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have rather the sharp snap of the epigram than the gentler flow of genuine familiar verse. And so certain of the slighter pieces in the Greek anthology, lovely as they are and exquisite, lack the modest amplitude fairly to be expected from a poem which claims admission into this charmed circle.

Brilliant it must be also; and this requirement excludes 'Sally in Our Alley,' for example, because this is "too homely and too entirely simple and natural"; and it keeps out 'John Gilpin' as well, because this is too frankly comic in its intent, too boldly funny. But the brilliancy must not be excessive; and the diffused glow of the incandescent lamp is better than the sputtering glare of the arc-light. If the brilliancy is attained by too violent and too obvious an effort, the light lyric is likely to harden into artificiality; and this is a danger that even Praed does not always escape. His 'Chaunt of the Brazen Head' has a luster that is almost metallic; the sparkle is undeniable, but in time the insistent antithesis reveals itself as mechanical at least, not to call it either tricky or tiresome.

Buoyancy is the third requisite; and this is not so easy to define as the others. Yet its necessity is plain enough when we note how heavy certain metrical efforts may be, altho they achieve brevity and even a superficial brilliance. They

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lack the final ease and the careless felicity; they are not wholly free from an awkwardness that is not unfairly to be termed lumbering. For example, buoyancy is just what is lacking in the riming epistle of John Wilson Croker 'To Miss Peel on her Marriage'—quatrains which Locker-Lampson held in sufficient esteem to include in his carefully chosen 'Lyra Elegantiarum' and which Mr. Swinburne despisingly dismist as "twenty villainous lines."

Just as comedy is ever in danger of declining into farce (a mishap that has almost befallen the 'Rivals,' for example), or else of stiffening into the serious drama (a turning aside that is visible in 'Froufrou'), so in like manner has familiar verse ever to avoid breadth of humor on the one side and depth of feeling on the other. It must eschew not merely coarseness or vulgarity, but even free and hearty laughter; and it must refrain from dealing not only with the soul-plumbing abysses of the tragic, but even with the ground-swell of any sweeping emotion. It must keep on the crest of the waves, midway between the chattering triviality of the murmuring shallows and the silent profundity of the depths that are dumb.

Perhaps this is one reason why so few of these brevet-poems have been the work of the greater wits or of the greater poets; familiar verse is

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too serious to carry all the fun of the jesters and too slight to convey the more solemn message of the major bards. Rather has it been the casual recreation of true lyrists not in the front rank; or else it has been the sudden excursion of those not reckoned among the songsters, often men of the world, for once achieving in verse a seeming spontaneity, like that which gives zest to a delightful conversation.

Perhaps again this is a reason why familiar verse can be found flourishing most luxuriantly when the man of the world is himself most abundant and when he has helped to set up an ideal of sparkling nimbleness in the give-and-take of social encounter. "When society ceases to be simple, it becomes skeptical," and when it "becomes refined, it begins to dread the exhibition of strong feeling;—" so wrote one of the reviewers of Locker-Lampson's collection; and "in such an atmosphere, emotion takes refuge in jest, and passion hides itself in skepticism of passion." And the reviewer added that there is a delicious piquancy in the poets who represent this social mood, and who are put in a class apart by "the way they play bo-peep with their feelings."

In the stately sentences of his time the elder Disraeli declared that in the production of *vers de société*, "genius will not always be sufficient

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to impart that grace of amenity which seems peculiar to those who are accustomed to elegant society. These productions are more the effusions of taste than genius, and it is not sufficient that the poet is inspired by the Muse, he must also suffer his concise page to be polished by the hand of the Graces."

Locker-Lampson maintained that "the tone should not be pitched high; it should be idiomatic, and rather in the conversational key; the rhythm should be crisp and sparkling, and the rime frequent and never forced, while the entire poem should be marked by tasteful moderation, high finish, and completeness: for, however trivial the subject-matter may be, indeed rather in proportion to its triviality, subordination to the rules of composition and perfection of execution should be strictly enforced." And Mr. Austin Dobson, drawing up 'Twelve Good Rules' for the writer of familiar verse, advised him to be "colloquial but not commonplace," to be as witty as he liked, to be "serious by accident," and to be "pathetic with the greatest discretion."

II

THOSE who may search Greek literature for frequent examples of familiar verse are doomed to disappointment and even in the lovely lyrics

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of the 'Anthology,' so human, so sad, so perfect in precision of phrase, we fail to find the lightness, the playfulness, the gaiety of true *vers de société*. We note brevity nearly always, brilliancy sometimes, and even buoyancy occasionally; we mark a lapidary concision that only Landor, of all the moderns, was ever able to achieve; but we feel that the tone is a little too grave and a little too austere. Perhaps the Greek spirit was too simple and too lofty to stoop to the pleasantry and prettiness of familiar verse. Perhaps the satiric reaction against excessive romanticism, which sustains so much modern familiar verse, was not possible before the birth of romance itself. Perhaps, indeed, the banter and the gently satiric playfulness of social verse was not to be expected in a race, no matter how gifted it might be lyrically, which kept woman in social inferiority and denied her the social privileges that give to modern society its charm and its variety.

At first glance it would seem as tho more than one lyric of Anacreon at least, and perhaps of Theocritus also, ought to fall well within the most rigid definition of familiar verse. But there is scarcely a single poem of Anacreon's which really approaches the type. The world for which he wrote reveals itself as very narrow; and he is found to be devoid of "catholicity of human in-

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terest," as Tom Hood asserted. His verses are a little lacking in tenderness of sentiment; and as Jebb said, Anacreon's "sensuousness is tempered merely by intellectual charm,"—and this is not what we require in social verse.

Theocritus also, exquisite as are his vignettes of Alexandrian life, perfect as they are in tone and feeling, clear cut as an intaglio and delightful as a Tanagra figurine,—Theocritus is at once too idyllic and too realistic. His verses are without certain of the characteristics which are imperative in genuine familiar verse. They are at once a little too homely and a little too poetic. If a selection from Greek literature was absolutely imperative, probably a copy of verses combining brevity, brilliancy, and buoyancy could be found more easily among the scanty lyrics of Agathias or of Antipater than amid the larger store of Theocritus or of Anacreon.

Perhaps it is the more prominent position of woman in Rome which makes a search in Latin literature a more certain pleasure. Yet the world in which Catullus lived, that "tenderest of Roman poets nineteen hundred years ago," while it was externally most luxurious, had an underlying rudeness and an ill-concealed coarseness. And Catullus himself, with all his nimble wit, his scholarly touch, his instinctive certainty of taste, was consumed by too fierce a flame of pas-

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sion to be satisfied often with the leisurely interweaving of jest and earnest which we look for in the songster of society. Only too infrequently does he allow himself the courtly grace of familiar verse,—as he does in his 'Dedication for a Volume of Lyrics,' in his 'Invitation to Dinner' and in his 'Morning Call,' so sympathetically paraphrased by Landor.

Half a generation later we come to Horace, a perfect master of the lighter lyric. He has the wide knowledge of a man of the world and the consummate ease of an accomplished craftsman in verse. He can achieve both the "curious felicity" and the "art that hides itself." And his tone, so Walter Bagehot insisted, "is that of prime ministers; the easy philosophy is that of courts and parliaments. . . . He is but the extreme and perfect type of a whole class of writers, some of whom exist in every literary age, and who give expression to what we may call the poetry of equanimity,—that is, the world's view of itself, its self-satisfaction, its conviction that you must bear what comes, not hope for much, think *some* evil, never be excited, admire little, and then you will be at peace." Perhaps this view of Horace's philosophy is a little too disenchanted; but Bagehot here suggested why this Roman poet was likely to be one of the masters of familiar verse; and it is Horace's catholicity of human

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interest, even more than his naturalness, which makes his lines sometimes so startlingly modern. It was easy for Thackeray to find London equivalents for the Latin 'Persicos odi,' and for Molière earlier, and Mr. Austin Dobson later, to imitate 'Donec gratus.' But there is little need to cite further, for no poet has tempted more adapters and translators,—not always indeed to his profit, since it is only by an inspiration as happy as the original that any modern may hope to equal the sureness of stroke characteristic of a poet who shunned the remote adjective and contented himself with the vocabulary of every day.

It is not pleasant to pass down from the benign rule of Augustus to the tyranny of Nero, and to contrast the constant manliness of Horace with the servility of Martial, a servility finding relief now and again in the utmost bitterness of unrestrained invective. Horace, with all his equanimity, was never indifferent to ideas, and he had an ethical code of his own; but Martial rarely revealed even a hint of moral feeling. He was cynical of necessity: and, therefore, is he habitually too hard and too rasping to attain the geniality which belongs to the better sort of social verse. Few of his poems are really long enough to be styled lyrics; and the vast majority are merely epigrams, with the wilful condensation and the arbitrary pointedness, that have been the

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bane of the epigram ever since Martial set the bad example. But even tho the Latin poet, as Professor Mackail asserts, made his strongest appeal "to all that was worst in Roman taste,—its heavy-handedness, its admiration of verbal cleverness, its tendency toward brutality," still now and again it is possible to pick out a poem that falls fairly within the definition of familiar verse,—'In habentem amaenas aedes,' for example.

III

WHEN at last we pass over the long suspension-bridge that arches the dark gulf between the ancient world and the modern, we discover that the more direct inheritors of the Latin tradition, the Italians and the Spaniards, have neither of them contributed abundantly to this special department of lyric poetry. It may be that the Spanish language is too grandiloquent and too sonorous to be readily playful; and perhaps the Spanish character itself is either too loftily dignified or too realistically shrewd to be able often to achieve that harmonious blending of the grave and the gay which is essential in familiar verse. It is true that Lope de Vega, early master of every form of the drama and bold adventurer into every other realm of literature, has left us a few poems that might demand

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inclusion; and among them is an ingenious sonnet on the difficulty of making a sonnet, which was cleverly Englished by the late H. C. Bunner and which may have suggested to Voiture his more famous rondeau, adroitly imitated by Mr. Austin Dobson. No doubt there are a few other Spanish poets—Gil Vicente, for one—who might be enlisted as contributors to an international anthology of familiar verse, but the fact remains that the Spanish section of any such collection would be slighter even than the Italian.

And the Italian contribution would not be very important, in spite of the national facility in improvisation,—or perhaps because of this dangerous gift. In the earlier Italian Renascence existence seems to have been almost too strenuous for social verse. As we call the roll of the Italian poets, we may note the names of not a few masters of the passionate lyric and of the scorching satire, but we find scarcely any writer who has left us verses of the requisite brevity, brilliancy and buoyancy. In Rossetti's 'Dante and his Circle' there is more than one poem that seems to have this triple qualification, although on more careful examination the sentiment is seen to be too sincere and too frankly exprest, or else the tone is too rarely playful to warrant any liberal selection from these fascinating pages. Perhaps even from this volume a more lively little piece might here and there be

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borrowed, such for instance as Sacchetti's catch 'On a Wet Day.' A little later there is Berni, whose metrical portrait of himself might fairly be compared—and not altogether to its disadvantage—with one or another of Praed's caressingly tender sketches of character. The Italians have no lack of biting epigram and of pertinent pasquinade; and they excel in broad burlesque and in laughable parody. But the mock-heroic, however clever it may be, is not the same as familiar verse. And even in the nineteenth century, where there was a firmer social solidarity, the only name which forces itself on our attention is that of Giusti,—whose idiomatic ballads have not unfairly been likened to the songs of Béranger.

The more northern languages are less likely to reward research, partly because of the prolonged rudeness of the Teutonic tongues and partly because of the more rigid seriousness of the folk that speak them. There is a true lyric grace in the songs of the minnesingers, despite their frequent artificiality; but they again are too direct and too purely lyric. However ingenious they may be, they are without the wit and the humor which we look for in familiar verse. Even the later and far greater Goethe, who, for all his Olympian serenity, revealed at times the possession of that specific levity which is a prerequisite for the songster of society,—even Goethe chose to condense his wit into the distichs of his

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'Xenien,' rather than to commingle it with his ballading. He himself thought it strange that with all he had done, there was no one of his poems "that would suit the Lutheran hymn-book"; and it is perhaps even stranger that scarcely any one of them would suit such an anthology as has been here suggested. Perhaps a claim might be made for his 'Ergo Bibamus,' which has almost briskness enough to warrant its acceptance.

From Heine, of course, a choice would be less difficult; and both the 'Widow and the Daughter' and the 'Grammar of the Stars' seem to meet all the requirements. But affluent as Heine is in sentiment and master as he is both of girding satire and of airy persiflage, there is ever a heart-break to be heard in his verses,—an unforgettable sob. The chords of his lyre are really too deep and too resonant for him to chant trifles. The "brave soldier in the war of liberation of humanity," as he styled himself, even in his paraded mockery and in his irrepressible wit, was really too much in earnest to happen often on the happy mean which makes familiar verse a possibility.

IV

In the French language, at last, the seeker after *vers de société* finds not only the name, but the thing itself, the real thing; and he finds it in

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abundance and of the best quality. Some part of this abundance is due, no doubt, to the French tongue itself, for, as a shrewd writer has reminded us, "a language long employed by a delicate and critical society is a treasury of dexterous felicities"; it may not be what Emerson finely called "fossil poetry," but it is "crystallized *esprit*." Society-verse might be expected to flourish most luxuriantly among a people governed by the social instinct as the French are, and keenly appreciative of the social qualities. The French invented the *salon*, which is the true hothouse for familiar verse; and they have raised both correspondence and conversation to the dignity of fine arts. As we scan the history of the past three centuries we note that in France society and literature have met on terms that approach equality far more nearly than in any other country. The French men of letters have often been men of the world, even if the French men of the world have been men of letters no more frequently than the English.

Moreover it is in prose rather than in poetry that the French have achieved their amplest triumphs. Whatever reservations an English reader must make in his praise of French poetry, he need make none in his eulogy of French prose. In prose the French have commonly a perfection to which we who use English can pretend only

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too rarely. Their prose has order and balance and harmony; it flows limpidly with a charming transparency; it is ever lucid, ever flexible, ever various; it has at once an obvious polish and an apparent ease. And to these precious qualifications for a form of poetry seemingly so unambitious as social verse, must be added the possession not only of the wit and the vivacity which are acknowledged characteristics of the French, but also their ownership of something far more needful—the gift of comedy.

"For many years the French have not been more celebrated for memoirs which professedly describe a real society than they have been for the light social song which embodies its sentiments and pours forth its spirit," said Bagehot, writing in the middle of the nineteenth century. He maintained that the French mind had a genius for the poetry of society because it had "the quickest insight into the exact relation of surrounding superficial phenomena." He held that the spirit of these lighter lyrics is ever half mirthful and that they cannot produce a profound impression. "A gentle pleasure, half sympathy, half amusement, is that at which they aim," he suggested; adding that, "they do not please us equally in all moods of mind: sometimes they seem nothing and nonsense,—like society itself."

Perhaps it is in consequence of the prosaic ele-

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ment perceptible in much of their more pretentious poetry that the French themselves have not considered curiously their own familiar verse. While there are nearly half a dozen collections of the *vers de société* of the English language, a diligent seeking has failed to find a single similar anthology in French. A book of ballades there is, but the most of these are serious in tone rather than serio-comic; the pertest of the many epigrammatic quatrains of the language have been gathered into an engaging little volume; but a selection of the best of their lighter lyrics, having brevity, brilliancy, and buoyancy, has not yet been undertaken by any French critic, altho he would have only the embarrassment of choosing from out a superabundance of enticing examples.

For the most part the vigorous verse of Villon, that "warm voice from the slums of Paris," has too poignant a melancholy to be included, for all its bravado gaiety; and though he tries to carry it off with a laugh, the disreputable poet fails to disguise the depth of his feeling. And yet it would be impossible to exclude the famous 'Ballade of Old-Time Ladies' with its unforgettable refrain, "Where are the snows of yesteryear?" A larger selection would be easier from Villon's contemporary, Charles of Orleans, longtime a prisoner in England,—a poet far less energetic and not so disenchanted, but possess-

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ing by birth "the manners and tone of good society." Stevenson especially praised his rondels for their "inimitable lightness and delicacy of touch" and declared that the royal lyrist's "lines go with a lilt and sing themselves to music of their own."

The rondel was the fixed form in which Charles of Orleans was most often successful, altho he frequently attempted the ballade also. This larger form the later Clément Marot managed with assured mastery. One of the best known of his more playful poems is the *ballade à double refrain* setting forth the duplicity of 'Brother Lubin,' a poem which has been rendered into English both by Bryant and Longfellow,—altho neither of them held himself bound by the strict letter of the law that prescribes the limitation and the ordering of the rimes properly to be expected in the ballade. As it happens, the American poets were not happily inspired in rendering this characteristic specimen of Marot's discreet raillery and metrical agility; and in their versions we fail to find the limpid lines and the polished irony of the French poet, who was able so easily to marry the elegant with the natural,—qualities rarely conjoined, even in French. And yet Locker-Lampson was able to paraphrase one of Clément Marot's lesser lyrics, 'Du Rys de Madame d'Allebert,' with indisputable felicity.

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Space fails here to select familiar verse from out the poems of Ronsard and Du Bellay and Desportes or to excerpt cautiously from the later poetasters who were forever riming in the ruelles of the *précieuses* and who clubbed together to go on record in the celebrated 'Guirlande à Julie.' But Corneille and Molière and La Fontaine cannot be treated in this cavalier fashion. Taine calls La Fontaine's epistles to Madame de Sablière "little masterpieces of respectful gallantry and delicate tenderness." It is this same note of tender gallantry which strikes us in the poems which Molière and Corneille severally addrest to the handsome and alluring actress, Mademoiselle Du Parc. Corneille's stanzas are almost too elevated in tone to permit them to be termed familiar verse; and yet when they are read in the English rendering of Locker-Lampson they do not transcend the modest boundaries of this minor department of poetry.

In the eighteenth century we come to Dufresny, with his 'Morrows,' a little comedy in four quatrains; to Piron, rather more inclined to the pert and pungent epigram than to the more suave and gracious song of society; and to Voltaire, the arch-wit of the age, accomplished in social verse as in every other conceivable form of literary endeavor. Perhaps it was of Voltaire that Lowell was thinking when he asserted that in French

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poetry only "the high polish kept out the decay." Yet it was Lowell himself who rendered into flowing English an epistle of Voltaire's to Madame Du Châtelet,—stanzas in which the aging wit refers to his years, not so touchingly as Corneille had done, it is true, but with dignity none the less.

In the nineteenth century it is possible to perceive two diverging tendencies in French *vers de société*, one of them being rather more obviously literary in its manner and including certain of the more piquant lyrics of Hugo, Musset and Gautier, while the other is somewhat humbler in its aim and seemingly simpler in its execution. To this second group belong the best of Béranger's ballads, of Gustave Nadaud's, and of Henri Murger's. Of Nadaud the one perfect example is 'Carcassonne' (so sympathetically Englished by John R. Thompson); and of Murger probably the most characteristic,—in its presentation of the actual atmosphere of that Bohemia which is truly a desert country by the sea,—is the lyric of 'Old Loves,' ingeniously paraphrased by Mr. Andrew Lang.

Goethe once declared that Béranger's songs "may be looked upon as the best things in their kind, especially when you observe the burden, without which they would be almost too earnest, too pointed and too epigrammatic for songs."

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And Goethe saw in Béranger a certain likeness to Horace and to Hafiz "who stood in the same way above their times, satirically and playfully setting forth the corruption of manners." Béranger is like Horace not only in his geniality and in his freedom from cynicism, but also in that he has tempted countless English translators,—mostly to their own undoing. At first glance it may appear that poetry so easy to read as Horace's or Béranger's, so direct, so unaffected, ought to be transferable into another tongue without great difficulty. But this appearance is altogether deceptive, and those who carelessly venture upon translation soon discover that all unwillingly they have been paying the highest compliment to the skill with which the metrical artist has succeeded in concealing his consummate craftsmanship. Even Thackeray, with all his cleverness, with all his understanding of Parisian life, did not achieve the impossible feat of making a wholly satisfactory English translation of a song of Béranger's, altho he twice attempted the 'King of Yvetot,' and altho he did not fail to bring over into English not a little of the sentiment and of the sparkle of the 'Attic.' In fact, it is this ballad of Béranger's which satisfies the definition of familiar verse more completely perhaps than any other piece of that Epicurean songster's.

A true lyric, whether ballad or sonnet or elegy,

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is not addrest to the eye alone; it is ever intended to be said or sung. The songs of Béranger are real songs, fitted to a tune already running in the head of the lyrist; and they have in fact sung themselves into being. The poems of Hugo and Gautier and Musset, even when they are most lyrical, are rather for recitation or reading aloud; they are not intended for the actual accompaniment of music. Once indeed Musset gave us a lyric, which is not only singable, but which seems to insist on an alliance with music. This single song is the 'Mimi Pinson' with its exquisite commingling of wit and melancholy. For the most part the stanzas of Musset are too full of fire and ardor to be classed as familiar verse; they have too rich a note of passion; and despite their brilliance they are of a truth too sad.

It is only occasionally also that a poem of Hugo's falls within the scope of this inquiry. His was too large an utterance for mere social verse; and the melody of his varied rhythms is too vibrating. His legends are epic in their breadth; and he lacks the unliterary simplicity and the vernacular terseness of familiar verse. For all his genius he is deficient not only in wit and in humor but even in the sense-of-humor; and there is not a little truth in Heine's gibe that Victor Hugo's "muse had two left hands."

From the treasury of 'Enamels and Cameos,'

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there is only the embarrassment of choosing, as no French poet has written poems more translucent than Théophile Gautier. His is the clear serenity of temper and the unfailing certainty of stroke which reveal the master of social verse. But the French poet's invincible dexterity is the despair of the translator. How render into another language the firmly chiseled stanzas of a lyrist who was enamored of the vocabulary and who was ever wooing it ardently and successfully? As Mr. Henry James says, Gautier "loved words for themselves,—for their look, their aroma, their color, their fantastic intimations." Locker-Lampson accomplished the almost impossible feat of finding English equivalents for Gautier's French,—in the first two quatrains of 'A Winter Fantasy';—but even he thought it best to end his own poem in his own way. Probably the translation that most triumphantly carries over into English the finest essence of Gautier's art is Mr. Swinburne's 'We are in love's land to-day.'

V

THE fact that a language may lack a satisfactory word to describe a certain thing is not always a proof that the people using the tongue are in reality deprived of that for which they may have no name of their own. In English, for example,

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there is no exact equivalent for the French *ennui;* —but who would be so bold as to question the British possession of this state of mind, altho it may be nameless in their speech? In French, again, there is no single word connoting all the shades of meaning contained in *home*;—and yet no race is more home-keeping than the French and no other nation has more sharply recognized in its laws the solidarity of the family. And altho the most usual term for familiar verse is *vers de société*, there is little doubt that English literature, taking into account both its branches, British and American, is at least as rich in this minor department of poetry as French literature may be. Indeed, the more carefully the social verse of the English language is compared with that of the French language, the more probable appears to be the superiority of the familiar verse in our own tongue,—a superiority not only in abundance but also in variety.

The French, as has been noted, have never been moved to bring together in a single volume the most characteristic of their lighter lyrics; and the absence of an adequate anthology makes it hard for a foreigner to assure himself that he is really acquainted with the best the French have to offer. But in English, as it happens, there is an anthology which is wholly satisfactory; and the finest examples of familiar verse, from the

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beginnings of our literature down to the middle of the nineteenth century, were collected in the 'Lyra Elegantiarum' of the late Frederick Locker-Lampson. With this volume in his hand it is easy even for the careless reader to perceive that the store of social verse in England is both ample and many-sided,—despite the fact that we are in the habit of borrowing a French name to describe it.

By excluding the work of all writers living when his volume was first issued, twoscore years ago, Locker-Lampson deprived his readers of any selections from his own 'London Lyrics,' from Calverley's 'Fly Leaves,' from Mr. Lang's 'Ballades in Blue China,' and from Mr. Austin Dobson's 'Vignettes in Rime.' He was also forced to leave out nearly all that was best in the books of our American writers, for the leaders of American literature were fortunately surviving when the British anthologist was at work on his collection. But even without making allowance for these self-imposed restrictions, the social verse collected by Locker-Lampson is remarkably fine; its average is surprisingly high and its range is astonishingly wide. And it shows that English literature from the days of Skelton and Sidney down to Hood and Thackeray in the middle of the nineteenth century, was illumined not only by great poets of lofty imagination and of sweep-

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ing power, but also by a host of minor bards who were able to "express more or less well the lighter desires of human nature," as Bagehot phrased it, "those that have least of unspeakable depth, partake most of what is perishable and earthly, and least of the immortal soul." These minor bards were masters in their own way and they were able to give their little masterpieces the brevity, the brilliancy, and the buoyancy which we expect in the best familiar verse.

Nor are the minor bards the sole contributors to 'Lyra Elegantiarum.' Not a few of the most characteristic pieces in Locker-Lampson's collection are from the works of the greater poets, the mighty songsters who are the glory of our literature. There is one poem of Shakspere's, 'O Mistress Mine, Where are you roaming'; and there are three of Ben Jonson's, including the lovely lyric, 'To Celia,'—

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup
And I 'll not look for wine.

There are three selections from Dryden, and there might easily have been more. There is one from Gray,—the delightful lines 'On the death of a favorite cat.' There are five by Byron and six by Coleridge; there is one by Wordsworth and

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another by Scott; and there are thirty-eight by Landor, "whose lightest and slightest claim to immortality," so Mr. Swinburne has asserted with his wonted and wanton exaggeration, "is his indistinguishable supremacy over all possible competitors as a writer of social or occasional verse, more bright, more graceful, more true in tone, more tender in expression, more deep in suggestion, more delicate in touch, than any possible Greek or Latin or French or English rivals."

Not only have the greater poets now and again condescended to the familiar verse in which success is almost as rare as it is in the loftier lyric, but the masters of prose have often been willing to adventure themselves as songsters of society. Among the dramatists, Congreve and Sheridan, of course, and Etherege and Vanbrugh as well, proved that upon occasion they could rime with the requisite facility and felicity. Of the novelists, both Smollett and Fielding more than once attempted to turn a couplet with playful intent. The politicians especially have been prone to seize on social verse as a precious relaxation from their sterner labors; and by no means the least interesting or the least admirable of the examples in Locker-Lampson's collection are the work of Chesterfield and the Walpoles,—both Robert and Horace,—of Canning and of Fox. The first Lord Houghton it was who suggested that "the fac-

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ulty of writing verse (quite apart from poetic genius) is the most delightful of literary accomplishments, and it almost always carries with it the more generally useful gift of writing good prose." And it may be that the gift of writing good prose carries with it the likelihood that its possessor may achieve distinction in the special department of poetry where vernacular terseness is ever a most valuable qualification.

But what the prose-writers and the greater poets have chanced to achieve in this variety of lyric, charming as it may be and unexpectedly exquisite, is after all a smaller contribution to our store of social verse than that which we have received from the half-dozen or the half-score lyrists who have won the most of their fame by their essays in familiar verse. In any history of *vers de société* in the British islands attention must be concentrated on Herrick and Prior, on Cowper and Goldsmith, on Praed and Hood, on Moore and Thackeray, and on Locker-Lampson and Austin Dobson.

It was in one of his juvenile essays that Lowell called Herrick "the best and most unconscious of the song-writers of his tuneful time." The best he is, no doubt; but is he really unconscious? Is it not rather that by a perfected art he could achieve spontaneity and the appearance of unconsciousness? Never do his unaffected lyrics

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reveal the long labor of the file; but who can guess what hidden toil underlay the lightest of his lovely trifles? Tho they may never smell of the lamp, but seem rather to have flowered on a spring morning and of their own volition, it would be rash indeed to deem Herrick only an improviser. There is the odor of an old-time garden in his fragrant rimes,—an echo of mating birds in the liquid melody of his varied measures. Waller's lines 'On a Girdle,' Carew's 'Prayer to the Wind,' Suckling's 'Ballad on a Wedding,' Lovelace's lyric on 'Going to the Wars,'—none of these excel Herrick's 'Gather ye Rose-Buds while ye may' in imponderable grace or in incomparable ease. And nowhere is there a metrical perfection more certain, a play of fancy more captivating than in the 'Bride-Cake,' and in 'Delight and Disorder.'

In Prior's familiar verse there is more of coarseness than there is in Herrick's—since the latter revealed his grosser likings chiefly in his epigrams. In Prior, again, there is a cynicism of tone, especially in regard to woman, which is far less frequent in Herrick's brisk ballading. But not a few of the foremost of Prior's pieces are as unstained as they are unaffected. Cowper—and no English poet ever had a better right to be heard on this subject—asserted that "every man conversant with verse-writing

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knows, and knows by painful experience, that the familiar style is of all styles the most difficult to succeed in. To make verse speak the language of prose, without being prosaic, to marshal the words of it in such an order as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extemporary speaker, yet without meanness, harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rime, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can undertake. He that could accomplish this task was Prior; many have imitated his excellence in this particular, but the best copies have fallen far short of the original." A past master Prior is of graceful gaiety, of debonair raillery, of jaunty audacity; and yet he may be found a little lacking in true feeling sometimes, in tenderness, if not in sincerity. But there is no denying his exhibition of all these qualities in what must be considered as his most perfect poem,—'To a child of quality five years old.'

Cowper and Goldsmith loom larger among the lesser British bards than some who have been admitted to the sacred heights solely because of their familiar verse; yet it is not by their most important works or by their most pretentious that they are now best known or best beloved. The careless ballad of 'John Gilpin' is likely to outlive the solid translation of the 'Iliad'; and

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'Retaliation' will probably outlast the 'Deserted Village.' Humor and good humor are found together in the familiar verse of both Cowper and Goldsmith, unlike as were the men themselves. Playful and cheerful are the 'Jackdaw' that Cowper took over from the Latin, and the 'Elegy on Mrs. Mary Blaise' which Goldsmith lightly borrowed from the French; and this playful cheerfulness is not so common that the verse it characterizes is likely soon to slip into oblivion. Nowadays, when more than a century stretches between us and the old-fashioned didacticism of Cowper and Goldsmith, the 'Task' may be left unattempted except by profest students of poetry; and the 'Traveler' may rest from his wanderings, reposing at last upon a dusty shelf. But there is still pleasure to be had in the perusal of the lines, 'On the Death of Mrs. Throckmorton's Bullfinch'; and the 'Haunch of Venison' still provides a feast for all who relish mischievous fun.

To-day the most ambitious poems of Moore seem sadly faded and outworn; even his songs, where "all is beautiful, soft, half-sincere," as has been remarked, "there is a little falsetto in the tone; everything reminds you of the drawing-room and the pianoforte." And setting aside some of the simplest and most singable of his 'Irish Melodies,' the best of Moore that now

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survives is a little group of society-verses, dealing aptly and piquantly with the tinkle of the piano-forte and with the chatter of the drawing-room. There is more than a Dresden-china prettiness in 'Lesbia hath a charming eye' and in 'Farewell!—but whenever you welcome the hour.' There is more than mere sparkle, there is feeling, superficial perhaps, but sincere as far as it goes, in his verses 'To Bessy.'

Hood's possession of pure pathos and also of frisky humor cannot be denied; but more often than not he preferred to display these qualities separately. Altho his verse can be on occasion crisp and brisk, as in 'I 'm not a single man' and 'Please to ring the belle,' he did not often try to attain the rare balance of fun and sentiment which is expected in familiar verse and which Thackeray achieved so frequently. There is a frolicsome tenderness and a gentle sparkle about the 'Mahogany Tree' and about the 'Ballad of Bouillabaisse' which is characteristically Thackerayan. The rhythm is free and flowing, the rimes are ingenious and frequent; and the humor is external while the pathos is internal. The smile wreathes the corners of the lip while the tear is held back beneath the eyelid. Bolder than these is 'Peg of Limavaddy' and deeper yet are the lines on the 'Album and the Pen.'

Thackeray derives from Cowper and from

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Goldsmith; while it is rather from Prior that Praed descends. Thackeray's verses are suave and suggestive; Praed's are sometimes a little hard; they have a luster that is almost metallic, and their vivacity is now and then almost too vigorous. But how certain the stroke is! How sharp the wit! How happy the rime! His portraits of persons are etchings rather than miniatures, and every feature is keenly limned. Even if his manner is at times a trifle mechanical, his antithesis unduly insisted upon, and his epigram over-emphatic, his wit is ever unflagging, his style is ever pellucid, and his rhythm is unfailingly dextrous and flexible. His radiance is rather that of the diamond than of the running brook; but the stone is always clear cut and highly polished and appropriately set. Mr. Austin Dobson has singled out 'My Own Araminta' as a characteristic example of Praed's more sparkling lyrics and the 'Vicar' as a satisfactory representative of his "more pensive character-pieces."

Mr. Austin Dobson is one of the two British bards whose supremacy in familiar verse was undisputed and indisputable in the final decade of the nineteenth century; and the other is Frederick Locker-Lampson. While Mr. Dobson derived his descent rather from Herrick, and, it may be, from Landor, Locker-Lampson had found his immediate model in Praed; and thus it happens

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that the 'London Lyrics' of the latter fall more completely within the narrower limits of social verse than do the 'Vignettes in Rime' of the former. Locker-Lampson's 'Piccadilly' and his 'St. James's Street' are truly songs of society with all the elegance and all the courtesy the fashionable world believes itself entitled to expect. Mr. Austin Dobson's 'Molly Trefusis' and his 'Ladies of St. James's' are a little larger in their appeal, as tho the poet had a broader outlook on life and refused to allow himself to be confined wholly within the contracting circle of society.

Locker-Lampson can be as witty as Praed, tho his wit is less obtrusive and his cleverness is less often paraded. He is far more tender and his touch is more caressing; and yet it is with Praed and with Prior that he is to be classed and compared. Mr. Austin Dobson is more of a poet; he has a lyric note of his own purer and deeper than any we can catch in their verses; and so it is that he is less at ease than they are within the limitations of social verse and that his finest poems are many of them not fairly to be considered as familiar verse. Indeed, it is not with Praed and Prior that Mr. Dobson is to be measured, but rather with their teachers in versification.

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VI

It is only toward the end of the eighteenth century that a division begins to be observable in the broadening stream of English literature and that it thereafter runs in two channels, British and American. Of course, whatsoever is written in the English language belongs to English literature, if only it attains to the requisite individuality and the needful elevation; and yet, almost as soon as there came into existence such a thing as American literature, not long after the people of the United States had severed their political connection with Great Britain, the writings of American authors revealed certain minor characteristics unlike those of the British authors who were their contemporaries. It is not easy to declare precisely what it is that differentiates the American literature of the nineteenth century from the British literature of the same hundred years; nevertheless there are few critics who have failed to perceive the existence of this difference, even if the most of them have been unable to analize it. As we here in the United States do not live under social conditions exactly like those acceptable to our kin across the sea, the more closely our literature is related to our own life, the more it must differ from that produced in the British Isles, despite the use of the same

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language and despite the inheritance of the same traditions.

This difference between American literature and British literature, unmistakable as it may be to many of us, is never very pronounced; and it is probably far less obvious in familiar verse than it is in poetry of a loftier aspiration. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the songsters of society must needs be bound by the customs and the conventions of well-bred circles, which will differ only a little no matter what the divergence of the latitude. The manners of Murray Hill cannot vary very much from those of Mayfair; and, in fact, the chief distinction between the familiar verse of the two countries is that the American poets have been less interested in Murray Hill than the British poets have been in Mayfair. In other words, American *vers de société* is less often a song of society itself than is its British rival; it has a little less of the mere glitter of wit and perhaps a little more of the mellower tenderness of humor. It shrinks less from a homely theme; and it does not so often seek that flashing sharpness of outline, which Praed delighted in and which sometimes suggests fireworks at midnight.

As might be supposed, the sparse specimens of familiar verse produced on this side of the Atlantic, while the future United States were still colonies of Great Britain, have the usual characteristics of

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all colonial literatures and reveal a close imitation of models imported from the mother-country. Even the satire of the revolutionary period, pointed as it is and piquant, and far more frequent than is generally known, has scant originality of form. The 'Battle of the Kegs' had British exemplars; and 'McFingal' owed much to the example of Butler and of Churchill. Except that a plangent note of personal experience—and of love of nature also—is heard in it, now and again, the vigorous verse of Freneau varies but little from that produced by his British contemporaries. And yet a handful of familiar verse may be gleaned even in this rather barren field; and more than one of Freneau's playful poems, the 'Parting Glass,' for instance, and the cheerful lines 'To a Katydid,' may keep company with a few other clever lyrics of this lighter sort.

Joel Barlow was the chief of the brave bards who wisht to discount the future and who sought most ambitiously to celebrate the coming glories of this country; and it is a curious instance of the irony of time that while Barlow's 'Columbiad' is as unreadable to-day—or at least as little read—as Timothy Dwight's 'Conquest of Canaan,' his unpretending rimes in honor of the 'Hasty-Pudding' are as fresh now, as lively, as amusing, as they were on the day they were penned. This sole surviving specimen of Barlow's poetic aspir-

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ation may incline a little too much toward the mock-heroic to fall completely within the definition of familiar verse; and it is a little lacking in the pathos which Thackeray infused into the 'Ballad of Bouillabaisse.' But the sincerity of Barlow's lines is as undeniable as their cleverness, their shrewdness, and their common-sense.

The reputation of the 'Croaker Papers' of Halleck and Drake is sadly dimmed nowadays; and the reader in search of true *vers de société* is sadly disappointed, since he finds in them only *vers d'occasion* the interest of which has departed with the changing years. They are "songs of dead seasons," to use Mr. Swinburne's phrase; and the most of these jocular lyrics of the collaborating bards which seemed so clever and so pointed when New York was only a tiny town on the toe of Manhattan, are seen to-day to be so thickly studded with contemporary allusions that they are readable only with the aid of plentiful annotation,—and what is the zest of a joke that needs a footnote to be visible? In fact, nothing of Halleck's or Drake's, whether written by either singly or by both in collaboration, has revealed so vigorous a vitality as the charming and fanciful 'Visit from St. Nicholas' of another New Yorker, their contemporary, Clement C. Moore.

The most of the American poets of a larger reputation have condescended to the lighter lyric

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upon occasion, and have written poems which fulfil the triple qualification of brevity, brilliancy, and buoyancy. Even the austere Bryant unbent his brows for once to tell in rime the tricksy habits of the bobolink; while Emerson chose rather to address himself with witty wisdom and glancing fantasy 'To the Humble Bee.' The grave and sedate Longfellow was willing to appear rather rollicking, in his swinging stanzas in praise of 'Catawba Wine'; and the simple Whittier once again went back to the years of his youth and in 'School-days' gave us a picture as clear as any of Prior's or Praed's and with a tenderness even more delicately suggested. This poem of Whittier's is evidence of the accuracy of Lowell's assertion that "sentiment is intellectualized emotion,—emotion precipitated, as it were, in pretty crystals by the fancy."

Lowell's own verse was too earnest and too strenuous for him often to be content with this sort of sentiment, which he called "the delightful staple of the poets of social life like Horace and Béranger. . . . It puts into words for us that decorous average of feeling to the expression of which society can consent without danger of being indiscreetly moved. . . . It is the sufficing lyrical interpreter of those lighter hours that should make part of every man's day. . . . True sentiment is emotion ripened by a slow ferment

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of the mind and qualified to an agreeable temperance by that taste which is the conscience of polite society." Had he so chosen, Lowell might have been the master of all Americans who have attempted familiar verse. He seemed to have every qualification,—the ready humor, the good-tempered wit, and the sincere sentiment that never curdled into sentimentality. As it is, he has left us a half a dozen, or, at the most, half a score of lyrics which belong by the side of the best examples of our social verse. 'Without and Within' is perhaps the most widely known; and 'Auf Wiedersehen' has been almost as popular.

It is Lowell's friend and fellow-professor that most critics would select as the foremost American songster of society; and this was also the opinion of Locker-Lampson, who declared in 1867 that Holmes was "perhaps the best living writer of this species of verse." Holmes's poems had most of them an eighteenth-century flavor; and they might well have borne an eighteenth-century title, 'Poems on Several Occasions,' since they had been so largely evoked by the current events in Boston, of which proud town he was the loyal bard. As he himself put it wittily,

> I 'm a florist in verse, and what would people say,
> If I came to a banquet without my bouquet?

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Unfortunately these flowers of metrical rhetoric, which seem so fresh when first plucked, fade only too swiftly when the occasion has fallen out of memory; and it is not surprizing that the most of Holmes's rimes for events at once local and transient are now of lessening interest. But what is really astonishing is that so many of them have kept their vivacity as long as they have. Of Holmes's *vers de société* as distinguished from his *vers d'occasion*, the best are as bright now as ever they were. The 'Last Leaf,' for example, has not withered. In 'Dorothy Q,' again in 'Lending a Punch-Bowl,' and in more than one other sprightly and sparkling lyric Holmes proves that society-verse may be, as Mr. Stedman has noted, "picturesque, even dramatic," and that it may "rise to a higher degree of humor and of sage and tender thought." 'Contentment' is another of Holmes's essays in familiar verse which is simply perfect in its ease and its certainty and its ironic humor. And the 'Deacon's Masterpiece,'—which most of us prefer to remember as the 'One Hoss Shay,' altho perhaps a little too long and a little too satiric to be called familiar verse, is one of the minor masterpieces of American literature.

Of the American poets who died before the nineteenth century drew to an end, three demand consideration here,—John Godfrey Saxe,

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Eugene Field, and Henry Cuyler Bunner. Of these Saxe was much the elder, by far the most old-fashioned in his method, and also the least individual. He had borrowed the knack of punning from Hood, and he had taken over the trick of antithesis from Praed. If Mr. Swinburne was right in asserting that even in the narrowest form of society lyric, we look "for more spirit and versatility of life, more warmth of touch, more fulness of tone, more vigor and variety of impulse than we find in Praed,"—then it is hard for us to grant high rank to Saxe, who was little more than Praed once-removed. Sometimes Saxe skirts perilously close to vulgarity; sometimes his humor is no better than crackling witticism; sometimes he fails to achieve the elevation of tone which even familiar verse ought ever to attain; sometimes he lacks even the suggestion of that sentiment which ought to underly the lyric of this type. But sometimes his success is evident and undeniable, as in the 'Mourner à la Mode,' for example, and in 'Early Rising,' and more especially in 'Little Jerry,'—a perfect portrait deftly touched with tenderness.

Eugene Field resembled Saxe at least in one respect,—his broadly comic lyrics are more abundant than his social verse. His humor was so spontaneous that it often became almost acro-

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batic, reveling in the exuberance of its own fun. He delighted in the apt use of slang; and it is his indulgence in this fondness for vernacular freshness which must rule out the 'Truth about Horace,' from any careful anthology of social verse, in spite of its brilliancy and its buoyancy. Field had not only a deeper knowledge of literature than Saxe, he had also a wider outlook on life. He had more originality, a richer native gift of metrical expression, a keener ingenuity in handling both rime and rhythm, a more daring adroitness of epithet; above all, he had far more feeling, and his sentiment was sincerer and sturdier. 'Little Boy Blue' is the most popular of Field's poems,—and it is also his finest effort in the limited field of familiar verse. 'Thirty-nine' and 'Old Times, Old Friends, Old Loves' have the same note of sentiment, more playful but not less pure. And even 'Apple-Pie and Cheese,' frolicsome as it is in its rhythm and in its gaiety, is still restrained enough and sufficiently decorous to come within the canon of familiar verse. Indeed it is curious to note how often good things to eat and to drink have inspired the songsters of society; and Field's 'Apple-Pie and Cheese' is the nineteenth-century mate of Barlow's eighteenth-century 'Hasty-Pudding.'

Bunner was more truly a poet than either Field

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or Saxe: he could strike a loftier note than they, at once more resonant and more appealing; his humor is more subtly united with his pathos; his lyre was more obviously a winged instrument than either of theirs. The 'Way to Arcady' has a freedom, an easy lightness, a graceful gentleness, a simplicity of sentiment, rarely seen in combination nowadays, altho not infrequent in the slighter songs of the Elizabethan dramatists. It was in fact the song of one who had skirted the coast of Bohemia on his way to the forest of Arden, where he was to feel himself at home, listening to the shepherds as they piped and looking on as the shepherdesses danced in the spring sunshine. Not only had Bunner profited by the example of Herrick and of Suckling, he had also felt the force of Heine's lyric irony and he had come under the charm of Mr. Austin Dobson's captivating music. His originality was compounded of many simples; but when he possest it at last, it was all his own. 'Forfeits' and 'Candor' are absolutely within the narrowest definition of society-verse; and they have an indisputable individuality of their own. So has the 'Chaperon,' with its flavor of old-time tenderness. So has 'One, Two, Three,' with its exquisite certainty of touch and its artful escape from sentimentality.

Of the living it is always less easy to speak

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with all due restraint than it is to criticize calmly those who have gone before, leaving us only their writings to influence the pending decision. Yet it would be absurd to omit here all mention of two of the American masters of familiar verse, Mr. Edmund Clarence Stedman and Mr. Thomas Bailey Aldrich. Theirs is never society-verse in its narrower sense, for their lightest lyrics are always poetry, with no trace of the striving and with no taint of the cheap smartness which only too often contaminates mere society-verse. Rather is theirs familiar verse in its most refined perfection, such as Cowper would have relished. Mr. Aldrich's 'Nocturne' has a spontaneity and a delicate grace that Herrick would have appreciated; and Mr. Stedman's 'Pan in Wall Street' has a commingling of wit with sentiment that recalls forerunners as dissimilar as Prior and Theocritus.

Other living American poets there are not a few who have adventured now and again in verse of this sort, seemingly so easy and actually so hard; and those who may hereafter attempt this species of poetry may be encouraged by the fact that altho success must needs be infrequent, its reward is as certain to-day as it was nearly a score of centuries ago when Pliny was writing to Tuscus that "it is surprizing how much the mind is entertained and enlivened by these little poeti-

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cal compositions, as they turn upon subjects of gallantry, satire, tenderness, politeness, and everything, in short, that concern life, and the affairs of the world."

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FRENCH POETS AND ENGLISH READERS

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[This paper was read before the Modern Language Association of America in December, 1908.]

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VIII

FRENCH POETS AND ENGLISH READERS

IN the leisurely eighteenth century, the age of ample prose, when every man seemed to have for his own use all the time there was, and when he was ever ready to bestow a full share of eternity upon the elaboration of lucubrations called forth by any topic that chanced to float within reach,—in those easy-going days, the full and proper title for the casual suggestions which are here to be set down might shape itself into something not unlike this: "On a certain Ineffectiveness of French Poetry for those Readers who have English as their Mother-tongue."

Probably few of us would be prepared to dispute the statement that a very large proportion of those whose native speech is English, and who yet have acquired more or less facility in reading other languages both ancient and modern, find French poetry less satisfying than the poetry of the Greeks and of the Latins, of the Germans and of the Italians. Some of us feel

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this so strongly that we are even a little surprized to discover that the French themselves do not feel it at all, and that few of them are prepared to admit any inferiority of their poets or any inadequacy of their language as a medium for poetry. It has seemed to some English critics almost a wilful freakishness, a personal perversity, when they beheld a French critic as clear-eyed and as open-minded as Taine contrasting Alfred Tennyson and Alfred de Musset, and then concluding with the declaration that, after all, he preferred Musset.

Brunetière was unable to discover any sufficient reason for the fact he admitted ungrudgingly, that altho French prose conquered all the nations of Europe, French poetry had been unable to win a firm foothold outside of the confines of its own language. That the French are the modern masters of prose is undeniable. Why are they not also the masters of poetry? Why is it that a list of the chief French authors, whether this roll-call extends to a dozen or a score or a hundred, would be illuminated chiefly by the names of prose-writers, whereas a corresponding list of authors using the English language would shine with a very large preponderance of the poets?

Perhaps it is not begging the question to lay on the French language the blame for certain of the deficiencies that we think we detect in

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French poetry. Perhaps it is not unprofitable to remind ourselves again that a language must of necessity resemble the people who speak it, and who have molded it instinctively to their own necessities and to their own natures. "There is room for a very interesting work which should lay open the connexion between the languages and the manners of nations,"—so wrote Gibbon in one of the frequent notes of his monumental history, the first volume of which appeared in the year when the English-speaking race was split into two peoples. The "very interesting work" which the great historian suggested has not yet been written. But its theme has attracted the attention of many an acute critic; and it would be easy to collect a sheaf of suggestions likely to be useful to the investigator who should undertake the task. For example, the Danish scholar, Professor Jespersen, thinks that English is essentially a virile speech, having about it little that is feminine or childish. Lowell was unwittingly commenting on the race that speaks German when he declared that he found in that language "sentences in which one sets sail like an admiral with sealed orders, not knowing where he is going till he is in mid-ocean."

In the language of the French we find the qualities which characterize the race—the social instinct, the logic, the regard for proportion and

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order, the inherited Latin tradition—all characteristics which make for prose and for the most pellucid prose, altho some of them are more or less hostile to poetry, and especially to lyric poetry. On the other hand, a certain lack of restraint discoverable in the writings of the stock that speaks English, an excessive individualism, a superabundant energy that transmutes itself easily into imagination—these are all qualities which make for poetry, and more particularly for lyric poetry. It is true also that they are qualities which make against prose in its finest perfection of artistic ease and of persuasive sanity. It is not by accident that English literature has had characteristic figures like Carlyle, with his humorous contortions, and like Ruskin, with his flamboyant bullying. Nor is it by chance only that French literature in the same century had Sainte-Beuve and Renan and Taine, dealing soberly with themes closely akin to those which the two British writers chose to handle vehemently and violently.

It was a Frenchman—Rivarol—who declared that what was not clear was not French. It was another Frenchman—Renan—who asserted that his fellow-countrymen cared to express only what was clear, altho "the most important truths, those relating to the transformation of life, are not clear; one perceives them only in a

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kind of half-light." Clarity is an essential of the best prose; but the subtlest and most suggestive poetry can get along without it. In some of Shelley's loveliest lyrics, for instance, the logic is a little doubtful, and the exact meaning is not beyond dispute. The very precision of the French vocabulary, with its sharp-edged words, bare of all penumbra, makes it difficult for those who have to use it as a medium for poetry to express the vague phases of emotion in the formative moods of feeling. Here seems to be a superiority of the Teutonic tongues, in that they can render more readily the saturated solution of emotion before it is precipitated, whereas the various inheritors of the Latin language can reproduce rather the sharp transparency of the crystal.

A colleag of mine at Columbia, when he was a student at Berlin, came to the reading of the psychologic studies of M. Paul Bourget after he had been steeping himself in German philosophy, and he discovered that the French author was struggling valiantly to express in his own tongue the rather nebulous ideas absorbed from this same German philosophy. In the transference of the German thought into the French language there was a gain in clarity, no doubt, but there was also the sacrifice of a hazy but far-reaching suggestiveness which might be an

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agent of imaginative stimulation. And what is poetry, after all, but another expression of philosophy? As Whitney once phrased it, "words are not the exact models of ideas; they are merely signs for ideas, at whose significance we arrive as well as we can." If the words of a language are sharply precise, they can best signify those ideas which have a precision equally acute. It was Rivarol, again, who declared that in French "the imagination of the poet is arrested also by the circumspect genius of the language."

Not only is the French language sharper than any one of the several Teutonic tongues,—and thereby better fitted for exposition, for the conveying of information, for criticism, for logic, for science, and in general for all the purposes of prose,—but it is also less musical, less accentual, more monotonous. It is a nasal speech, and its tones are less beautiful than those of its Latin sisters, Italian and Spanish, studded with open vowels,—less beautiful really than those of English when our Northern language is handled by a master of sounds who knows how to evoke the melody of which it is capable. No French poet has been able to make his words sing themselves into the memory more certainly than Victor Hugo; and yet even that virtuoso of the lyric has left us few stanzas sustained by the

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haunting harmony which lifts up many of the lines of Tennyson. Even Poe, whose equipment is meager enough, even if his accomplishment is surprizing, can on occasion achieve a mastery of mere sound, denied to Hugo despite all his marvelous native gift and all his consummate craftsmanship in compelling words to do his bidding.

French verse seems to be curiously dependent on its rimes for its structure. In his little treatise on the art of versification, Banville is frank in avowing this and in setting forth plainly the importance of the principle. It is significant that blank verse has never been able to establish itself in French poetry; and French prose is almost free from those passages of unconscious blank verse such as Dickens fell into when he wanted to emphasize the pathos of his sentimental death-beds. Without its pairs of rimes the poetry of the French is barely distinguishable from prose—at least by a foreign ear. And as a result the poets of France have centered their attention on rime, and have forced from it possibilities unattained as yet by the poets who use the accented Teutonic tongues. No dextrous manipulator of English has yet extracted from his rimes alone the sustaining effects which Heredia wrought into his lustrous sonnets by the artful choice and contrast of his terminal syl-

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lables. Nor has any lyrist of our language ever juggled with iridescent rimes as Victor Hugo was wont to do, dazzling the eyes of the reader with the incomparable brilliance of his selection.

The French poets are forced to rely largely on their rimes because their language is in a way monotonous,—if not absolutely devoid of accent. There is no denying that it is far less accentual than German or English. Nisard declared that French was unique among all languages in that it was wholly without accent; and he even maintained that this deficiency helped to fit the language for universal use, since accent was what was most individual in human speech. And here we have another reason why French poetry is less satisfying to our ears, attuned to the bolder rhythmic swing of the Teutonic meters. Here, indeed, is an obvious disability of the French, which puts their poets at an indisputable disadvantage. Emotion is accentual, just as all nature is also. The instinctive cries of primitive man are undulatory. The spontaneous expression of feeling rises and falls, like the waves of the sea. There is a cadence in the crooning of the mother over her babe asleep in the cradle, as there is also in the bitter wailing of the tribe over its dead. In so far as the French language has a barrenness of accent, and a fundamental monotony of syllabic utterance, and in

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so far as it tends to require its lyrists to abstain from stress, from undulation, it is deprived of an emotional resource, of a method of appeal to the soul through the ear, which has been potent in poetry since the far-off ages when primitive man had not yet discovered the utility of prose.

It is not safe to accept Nisard's assertion that the French language is absolutely without accent. But it is fair enough to suggest that the rhythmic variety of French is far more subtle, far less obvious, than that existing in any of the Teutonic tongues. In giving up a more plainly markt accent, a rhythm perceptible to the ear accustomed to the bolder alternations of stress more easily measured in our own speech, the French have shorn their language of an emotional instrument, of a physical advantage, preserved for the use of the poets of almost every modern tongue. Sometimes the French insist on the equality of every syllable in a line, and sometimes they profess to be able to detect a play of accent imperceptible to the foreign ear habituated to the marching rhythm of other languages. For the most part, their own writers have failed to see how large this loss is, in thus surrendering what was the birthright of primitive man. Unfamiliar with this emotional instrument, they do not perceive that its absence enfeebles the appeal which their poetry makes on foreign ears.

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Naturally enough, they themselves do not miss that which they have never possest.

It was the wise Mommsen who called Ciceronianism a problem which is part of "that greater mystery of human nature—language and the effect of language on the mind." And it was the shrewd Bagehot who asserted that there was "a certain intimate essence of national meaning which is untransmutable as good poetry. Dry thoughts are cosmopolitan, but the delicate associations of language which express character, the traits of speech which mark the man, differ in every tongue, so that there are not even cumbrous circumlocutions that are equivalent in another." This is one of the reasons why the best translation can never be more than an inferior substitute for the original. No one can really feel the inner meaning of a poem until he has conquered an insight into the language in which it sang itself into being. And even when the reader has gained this essential mastery of the foreign speech, it remains foreign, after all; it can never be more than an academic accomplishment; it can never make the intimate appeal of the songs originally phrased in the mother-tongue. As Sidney Lanier declared poetically, every word of a poem "is like the bright head of a comet drawing behind it a less luminous train of vague associations,

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which are associations only to those who have used such words from infancy."

This remark of Lanier's may help us to grasp a third reason why Hugo and Musset are less satisfying than Goethe or Heine to us who have English for our native speech,—a reason to be seized only when we recall the lasting effects of the impress of French upon English when our language was yet in its plastic youth. The Norman conquest brought about a mingling in our tongue of French words with the ruder vocables of Anglo-Saxon origin; and English has been free ever since to enrich itself from a twofold store, taking from the Romance stock with the right hand and from the Teutonic with the left. As a result of this admixture the vocabulary of English is probably ampler now than that of any other language.

It is true, of course, that there is a large infusion of Romance words in modern German speech, as there is also a large infusion of Teutonic words in modern French speech; but neither French nor German has a double vocabulary for ordinary use as English has. Now, if we classify the English words in ordinary use into two groups, the first embracing what may be called the primary words, those which we use instinctively in the hour of need and at all other moments of tense emotion, and the second em-

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bracing the secondary words, those with which we are equally familiar, no doubt, but which do not rise as readily to our lips,—if we undertake this classification, we know in advance that the larger proportion of the primary words will belong to the Teutonic stock, and that a larger proportion of the secondary words will belong to the Romance stock. As Herbert Spencer recorded, "a child's vocabulary is almost wholly Saxon." And the same acute observer also declared that "the earliest learnt and oftenest used words will, other things being equal, call up images with less loss of time and energy than their later learnt synonyms."

To call up images is a chief purpose of the poet; and he will succeed in English largely in proportion to his choice of the primary words, chiefly of Teutonic descent, and to his skill in extracting from them all their essential suggestion. When he prefers the secondary words, of Romance origin mostly, he is likely to seem less direct, less vigorous, and even less sincere. But if these verbal characteristics so impress us in the lyrics of our own language, in all probability they will so impress us also in the verses of foreign poets. Thus it is that we who have English for our mother-tongue find in German poetry a free use of Teutonic terms closely akin to our own primary words; and we cannot

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help finding in French poetry that Romance vocabulary which recalls our own secondary words, to us always more or less inferior in emotional suggestion. Both in French and in German the poets are using words which are primary to them, but in consequence of our double vocabulary only the words of the German poets seem primary to us. The words of the French poets must necessarily appear to us as secondary,—that is to say, as less direct, less vigorous, and even as less sincere than the words of the German poets.

To say this, of course, is not to pass any ultimate condemnation on French poetry, but only to explain one reason why it is less effective to those who speak English than it is to those who speak Italian or Spanish. To us the homely talk of the hearth, the stuff out of which the simplest poetry is made, is largely Teutonic; but when an inheritor of the Latins handles this same stuff he cannot command other than Romance vocables. The French lyric which appears to us indirect and ineffective, simply because the poet must perforce employ words which seem to us secondary, will be satisfying to a Frenchman, to whom these same words are primary; and to him it may appeal as a masterpiece of vigorous sincerity.

Many of those who are best fitted to appreci-

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ate the finer qualities of French literature have always felt that there was a lack of fairness in Matthew Arnold's trick of comparing poetical fragments in French and in English, to the foreseen disadvantage of the foreign lyrist. The victory was a little too easy to be quite worth while; and it failed to carry conviction even to those who were willing enough to admit that French poetry did not satisfy them. Yet this French poetry does satisfy the capable and accomplished critics of France, a land where criticism is cultivated as a fine art. May not this divergence of opinion be due to the two causes here indicated? First, to the fact that French verse is far less accentual than the verse of any of the Teutonic tongues, and that therefore it is emotionally feebler to us who are accustomed to the stronger beats of our own stanzas; and, second, to the fact that the French words most needed by the poet seem to us who speak English secondary, less direct, and therefore less effective, altho these very words are primary to the French poet himself and to his French readers. This second disadvantage applies more particularly to the poetry of the simpler emotions. But the poetry of a more sweeping imagination is also more or less unsatisfactory to us because the marvelous clarity of the French language deprives the poet who works in it of a power of

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indefinite suggestion possible to the poets who have English or German or Greek for their mother-tongue.

It remains only to be noted that these two disadvantages of French poetry are neither of them discoverable in Italian poetry or in Spanish,—or at least not discoverable to the same extent. In the first place, both these other Romance languages are more obviously rhythmic, with accentual systems easily perceptible to the ears attuned to Teutonic alternations of stress. And in the second place, the Romance words in English are derived most of them directly from the French, whereas the Italian and Spanish forms of the same word are often so different from our secondary words that they need an effort of perception and so evoke the primary emotions, rather than the secondary, which are called forth by the corresponding French words. It is true also that clarity is not the chief characteristic of either Italian or Spanish, as it is of French.

(1908.)

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A NOTE ON ANATOLE FRANCE

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IX

A NOTE ON ANATOLE FRANCE

THERE is an obvious significance in the fact that a score of years ago, altho Renan and Taine were still alive, the most interesting personalities in French literature were three story-tellers, Zola, Daudet and Maupassant, whereas today the chief figures are two critics, M. Jules Lemaître and M. Anatole France, disciples both of them rather of the caressing Renan than of the more invigorating Taine. It is true that both of these have also adventured themselves into story-telling and into play-writing, but nevertheless their tales, their novels and their dramas are essentially critical in temper. M. France has been more persuasive and prolific than M. Lemaître in the creation of character; and yet he is also more distinctly critical in his abiding attitude. He has analized books, and men, and society at large, and humanity itself; and never does he let the scalpel and microscope drop from his hands. He is fundamentally a

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critic, even in that lower and commoner meaning of the word which limits criticism to fault-finding. His criticism is incessant, dissolving and destructive. He is diligent in proving all things; and at the end of his inquiry he finds little or nothing true enough for him to hold fast.

A familiar French proverb declares that to understand everything is to pardon everything; and M. France understands everything,—except perhaps those very commonplace virtues which sustain the social fabric; and he pardons everything, virtues as well as vices, with an equal toleration and with an equally disintegrating irony. He is the most richly cultivated of critics and the least academic. He has absorbed the essence of traditional standards while discarding all their non-essentials. His sympathetic appreciation is as unfailing as his intelligence is open; indeed, his intelligence is so open that it has rejected all formulas, ethic as well as esthetic. He is a frank pagan, with a paganism thru which Christianity has filtered leaving only an impalpable deposit. He is full of compassion for the spectacle of human folly and of human misery; but his compassion is sustained by little hope for the dawn of a better day. To him life is a tragic farce. He is a pessimistic anarchist, who is master of an incomparable style, melodious and harmonious, caressing and picturesque.

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He has the faculty of ever finding the fit phrase for his thought, at once beautiful in itself and exact in its precision. His style is the style of a scholar who is also a man of the world,—an exquisite style, rich in thought and ripe in color, subtle and supple, fluid and limpid,—a style as sinuous and enveloping as the irony which supports its iridescence. His writing is always delightful even if it is often disconcerting.

There are three strains intertwined in the modern Frenchman—Celt and Latin and Norman; and all three reveal themselves in M. France. He has the gay and girding humor of the Celt, the order and the traditional reserve of the Latin, and the sturdy obstinacy of the Norman. The inconsistencies discoverable in his writings may be ascribed to the wrestling of these three diverse inheritances. The perfect proportion and the artistic harmony of such a brief tale as the 'Procurator of Judea'—one of the marvelous masterpieces of the short-story—may be credited to the Latin tradition, while the deliberate formlessness of the four consecutive volumes of 'Contemporary History' (in which M. Bergeret is the salient character) is Celtic in its lawless rejection of all the accepted canons of construction. The earlier short-story has the severe simplicity of a Greek intaglio, the flawless perfection of a gem carved

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by a consummate artist, while the later and larger narrative is deliberately projected as a sprawling succession of casual episodes, each of them significant in itself; it is a thing wholly without precedent, a work of art without form, altho never void, and in the looseness of the thread which unites its parts it can be likened only to the wanton laxity of Sterne.

M. France's occasional kinship to Sterne is evident enough, especially in his occasional insistence upon the coarser aspects of human nature; but the French writer's scholarship is never second-hand, as the Englishman's was only too often. Disraeli once declared that he had been born in a library; and M. Anatole France was even more fortunate in that he was born in an old book-shop, the shelves of which were incessantly replenishing themselves as no library is likely to do. He grew up in an atmosphere of old things,—old books, old bindings, old prints. He has a solid education; and he early acquired genuine erudition. He learnt in his youth to distinguish the good edition—the one with the misprint on the title-page. He absorbed the Greek lyrists of the Alexandrian decadence as well as the French philosophers of the iconoclastic eighteenth century.

A child of Renan, he is a grandchild of Voltaire, altho he has less arrogance than the former

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and less aridity than the latter. The influence of Renan is indisputable, and yet the kinship with Voltaire is more obvious. We find in M. France the intellectual agility, the easy playfulness, the mordant wit, the corrosive irony, and even the occasional fondness for unclean innuendo which characterize Voltaire, who also was primarily a critic, applying touchstone and acid to every accepted belief. As Voltaire came forward in a manly fashion in defense of Calas, so M. France stood forth boldly in the dark days of the Dreyfus iniquity and did his best to bring his fellow-citizens back to the path of sanity;—and here, it may be noted, his attitude was wiser and more courageous than that of M. Lemaître. And it was from Voltaire that M. France borrowed the formula of the brief philosophic story, the pertinent apolog, as significant as a primitive folk-tale. Close as may be his affiliation with Voltaire, he throws back also to Montaigne in his frankness of speech and in his willingness to make the best of the world while thinking none too well of it.

He was earliest made known in the United States by the candid and delicious narrative called the 'Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard,' magically rendered into English by Lafcadio Hearn, who was sympathetically gifted to comprehend the stylist he was translating. And none of M.

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France's books is better fitted to win him a welcome from the English-speaking peoples. Its charm is all its own; and it represents its author at his best, before his irony had begun to corrode his own belief in mankind. It is a tender tale, human and humane, urban and urbane, touched with sentiment and tinged with romance. It is bathed in melancholy, refreshing and never saddening. It does not leave a bad taste in the mouth, as the 'Red Lily' does. This more elaborate and more sophisticated fiction is unfailingly clever, as it could not help being; but it may be dismist as almost a failure in spite of all its cleverness. It seems to have been written in rivalry with M. Paul Bourget's pretentiously cosmopolitan novels of fashionable intrigue. But the significant difference is that M. Bourget takes his high-born puppets seriously; and this is just what M. France could not do.

In writing the 'Red Lily' he seemed somehow to be working against the grain; and perhaps the same thing might be said of his 'Histoire Comique,' in which his model is rather Maupassant than Bourget. Yet this later novel is far less imitative and far more spontaneous than the earlier, even if it reveals the wilful twist of indurated pessimism. Its humor, playful enough, is also a little grim; and it has even a tincture of the gruesome. It is veracious in its

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own way, but it does not tell the whole truth; and thus it provides us with only a distorted vision of life. It lacks the paradoxical playfulness that flashes and ripples thru the 'Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque,' a narrative as esthetically exhilarating as it is ethically unsettling. And there is the same dexterity of craftsmanship, the same appalling cleverness, in the still later 'Island of Penguins,' the most disenchanted of all its author's books, recalling the last part of 'Gulliver's Travels' in the blank inhumanity of its chill negation. Here M. France in the twentieth century, like Swift in the eighteenth, has set before us a nightmare of misanthropy.

We find the same monotony of needless misery in 'Jocaste.' A pretty girl likes a young man and marries an old one; the husband is poisoned by his servant, who also kills another man, for which he is executed; the wife hangs herself; and the young man who loved her and whom she loved develops a fatal disease. There is cold-blooded cruelty in this morose fantasy; it is painful and profitless, a mere wantoning in ineffectual wo, with no suggested steeling of the soul for the combat of life. It is a disheartening tale, without any excuse for its existence since it lacks the saving grace of pity. It affects to be tragic; but it lacks the inexorable inevitability of real tragedy. The characters are killed off by

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the author himself; and we feel that they themselves had no responsibility for their fatal acts. The final verdict on 'Jocaste,' and perhaps on two or three of M. France's other stories, must be that they were not worth while. His choice of theme is not always felicitous, even if the execution is ever faultless.

For his workmanship is impeccable even when his subject is abhorrent; and the result is beyond all praise when he happens upon a topic fit for his special treatment and wherein his special qualities can display themselves,—in the 'Procurator of Judea,' for example, in which he evokes the past as with a magic glass. In his score of volumes there are perhaps a dozen other short-stories, inferior only to this imaginative resuscitation of Roman life and character, as instinct with vitality, as authentic in atmosphere, and as alluring, opalescent all of them with the keen interplay of wit, humor and scholarship sustained at once by intelligence and imagination. All of them disclose his gift of sympathetic comprehension, his searching insight, his faculty of pity. And all of them again, if we look into them closely, are seen to be the work of a critic, quite as obviously as they are the work of a creative artist. In all of them we can catch the echo of negation.

These masterpieces of the short-story are mar-

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vels of artistic execution, as careful in structure as in style. Thus they stand in absolute antithesis to the four volumes in which we read about the sayings and doings of M. Bergeret, since the primary intent of this 'Contemporary History' is to avoid structure, to escape from unity and regularity, to make a story without beginning and without end. It commences anywhere and it concludes anywhere. Formlessness is of the essence of the contract. It was the Latin in M. France who planned the short-story in which Pontius Pilate is resuscitated, and it was the Celt who compiled the rambling and incoherent chronicle of M. Bergeret and of his fellow-citizens of the French republic in the tenth decade of the nineteenth century. Perhaps in the first decade of the twenty-first century this may be esteemed M. France's most important work; certainly it is the most individual and the most original. After the novel had been bourgeoning abundantly in every modern language, M. France was ingenious enough to find a new form for it; and his very original device was to do away with form altogether, to compose a story wilfully devoid of structure. It was a novelty in fiction, a new idea in story-telling, carried out unflinchingly, with superb skill and with exact understanding of all its possibilities. In no other of his writings

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does he more amply display his extraordinary endowment and his extraordinary equipment. Every sporadic chapter is set before us with an incessant glitter of glancing wit, of biting humor, of cutting satire and of piercing paradox.

Mr. Austin Dobson once praised Miss Austen for apparently not inventing the episodes of 'Pride and Prejudice,' but merely selecting them; and in this 'Contemporary History' M. France has deserved the same praise and in an even higher degree, since he seems not even to have selected his episodes, but only to have taken those nearest to his hand. He has actually given us the "slices of life" that Zola and Daudet sought to set before the reader; but they endeavored to combine these realistic transcripts into an artistic whole, whereas M. France merely juxtaposes them one after another, all of them vibrating with the same intense actuality. He contributed these dissolving views of French society to a daily newspaper, mirroring the shifting events at the very moment when they had the utmost of "contemporaneous human interest." He was not only up-to-date, he was up-to-the-last-minute. He carried over into fiction the strident note of the latest edition of the evening paper.

But however journalistic the narrative may be, it has the full flavor of literature always. Up-

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to-date as it was then, it is not out-of-date now. It is a permanent photograph of the daily kaleidoscope of France in the dismal years of the Dreyfus disgrace. It will survive as an invaluable document, elucidating the temper of that time for all time. Evanescent as its topics may be, there is nothing ephemeral in their treatment. Indeed, the topics themselves serve chiefly for discussion from the divergent points of view of the several characters, all representative and significant, all vital and pertinent, all seized in the act and fixt once for all. It is in this unending discussion of events, of opinions, and of prejudices that M. France is most brilliantly himself and most acutely critical. If that fiction must be dismist as inferior which deals rather with external happenings than with internal humanity, and if that form of the novel is superior which rejects the attraction of artful plot to focus interest solely on character, then has M. France attained to a summit not trodden by any predecessor, since his plotless volumes are densely populated with recognizable human beings.

In this helter-skelter story,—if story that can be called which has none,—in this undramatic drama with its hundred acts, M. France has caught the multiplex and heterogeneous aspect of life itself. He has achieved an artistic triumph

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by renouncing the unity of design which is a fundamental requirement of art. Inconsequence is here made an essential element of the most delicate art. Anything may happen at any time, or nothing may happen, as chance decides. Perhaps this is a feat which only his surpassing cleverness could accomplish. He has blazed a new trail in the thick forest of fiction; and it will be interesting to see what will happen when any man less gifted shall risk a stroll in the devious path M. France was the first to tread. This follower will need to be a painter of unexpected adroitness and of indefatigable insight if he shall hope to rival the gallery of superb portraits thru which we wander in these four loose-leaf volumes.

In one respect, and in one respect only, will it be easy for the future pupil to excel his master,—by avoiding that occasional insistence upon the animal side of life wherein M. France vies with Maupassant and errs more gratuitously. Maupassant had no prejudice against any theme, fair or foul, but he treated each in accord with its nature, with the result that there is never a hint of indelicacy in any story of his the theme of which is not itself indecorous. M. France seems never to have heard the proverb which declares that dirt is matter in the wrong place.

To say this is not to suggest here that M.

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France is immoral; it is only to assert that he is sometimes indecent. Morality may be a matter of opinion, varying with the peoples and with the centuries; and a philosophic critic like M. France may be justified in casting doubts upon all our principles, as well as upon all our prejudices. His books are morally relaxing; they are not spoon-meat for babes. Rather are they for mature men who can weigh the external questions of incidental ethics, each of us for himself. But mature men are likely to have the healthy palate which does not demand the provocation of a highly spiced sauce. Mr. Henry James once suggested that, morally, George Sand had no taste; and there are episodes in more than one of M. France's works amusing in themselves but grating on our teeth, and leaving us a little ashamed of the laughter they aroused. And here we see the Celt again getting the upper hand of the Norman, and even of the Latin; the Celt is wilful, where the Norman is logical and the Latin reserved.

Indecorum is one thing and immorality is another; and the question whether or not a work of art is moral must often depend on our point of view. Some arts—architecture, for example, and music—stand completely outside ethics; the other arts deal with men and women,—the drama and the novel in prose or in verse,—and

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in these the artist cannot evade his moral responsibility. Conduct is three-fourths of life, whatever we may say; and the dramatist and the novelist cannot eschew ethics. They need not—indeed, they should not—put any moral into their work; but wo betide them if they leave it out. It is and it must be "part of the essential richness of inspiration," as Mr. James once declared. Life is a saturation of literature, and the artist cannot slip out of his obligation to tell the truth as he sees it, even if the ultimate morality depends upon the reader. "There is no quite good book without morality," said Stevenson; "but the world is wide, and so are morals"; what is one man's meat is another man's poison; and M. France's writings may not be for all sorts and conditions of men; a few of them are only for those who are eupeptic and even stout of stomach.

His earlier books provoked us to healthy thinking over the discrepancy between our vaunted ideals and the ugly compromises we are prone to accept without repugnance. Some of his later books tend to benumb our will by showing that the gap between theory and practice yawns too wide and too deep ever to be bridged. In these later books he sets before us a world of corrupt refinement peopled by beings intelligent enough to be interested in moral ideas without ever allow-

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ing these ideas to control their own conduct. He seems to suggest that any rule of life is illusive, a shifting and fading shadow; for humanity at large he has an infinite pity, with never a suggestion of hope. And here the acid of his criticism is too powerful a dissolvent; it is an *aqua regia* which even the purest gold cannot resist. After all, there are some paradoxes which are not true. As we turn the pages of the 'Island of Penguins,' for example, we feel as tho the fabled law had actually been promulgated which declared that "everything is abolished" and that "no one is charged with the execution of this decree." Perhaps for this reason M. France may seem to some the most representative of French authors in this opening decade of the twentieth century, as he is the most charming. He is always abundant in modern instances which sharpen the teeth of old saws; and he is affluent in ideas of his own, at once subtle and searching. The child of Renan and the grandchild of Voltaire, he will have progeny of his own in the years to come; and the critics of the next generation will have an attractive task when they undertake to trace his influence upon the French literature of the future.

(1910.)

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POE'S COSMOPOLITAN FAME

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[This address was delivered at Columbia University on January 19, 1909, at the celebration of the centenary of Poe's birth.]

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X

POE'S COSMOPOLITAN FAME

THERE is an obvious propriety in extending to a centenary celebration the benefit of the adage which declares that we must not speak ill of the dead. Yet we cannot overlook the fact that any praise we may now bestow will crumble swiftly unless it is solidly supported. Every attempt at beatification must be futile unless the Devil's Advocate has been allowed full liberty of speech. In the case of Poe the voice of adverse criticism has never been silenced; and if we see fit to laud him today, it is only after we have been forced to listen to the shrill protests of his assailants. Amid the chorus of eulogy which has been arising around him of late, here and elsewhere, our ears recall the echo of many a harsh and bitter judgment. Half a century ago the honored chief of the New England group of authors contemptuously dismist Poe as "the jingle-man." A quarter of a century ago one of the subtlest of American critics, Mr. Henry James,

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casually referred to Poe's "very valueless verses"; and only this month a master of acute literary analysis, Mr. W. C. Brownell, has called Poe a conjurer in literature, only a charlatan.

Over against the adverse opinions of these American writers we may set the estimate of not a few foreigners. Tennyson, for one, held Poe highest among American poets, waving aside certain others, more popular with us, as mere pigmies compared with him, and declaring him "not unworthy to stand beside Catullus, the most melodious of the Latins, and Heine, the most tuneful of the Germans." And the general opinion of the French is not lower than that of the British poet-laureate, if we may judge by the fact that in a recent list of the hundred foremost figures in literature, Poe is the only American. There is wisdom in the assertion made three centuries ago by an earlier poet-laureate, Ben Jonson, when he said that "Men, and almost all sortes of creatures, have their reputation by distance; Rivers, the further they runne and the more from their spring, the broader they are, and greater."

Notwithstanding the natural desire of a young nation to make the most of all its native authors, Poe has his reputation by distance. And this raises a series of interesting questions. Why is it that Poe's position as a poet and as a writer of

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fiction is still in dispute in his own country? Why is it that American critics have been far less cordial than foreign critics? Why is it that Poe's cosmopolitan fame is more wide-spread and more solidly establisht than his repute here in the land of his birth? Why is it that we Americans seem to hold Poe inferior to Longfellow as a poet, and to Hawthorne as a teller of tales, in spite of the fact that he has won acceptance among the French and the Italians and the Spaniards, who have never cared to become acquainted with Longfellow and with Hawthorne? These are questions easier to put than to answer; and yet if satisfactory responses can be found, they will help to explain Poe's true position in American literature.

If the significance of an author is to be measured by the extent of the attention he has aroused in other writers, there is no denying the high importance of Poe, since no American man of letters has been the subject of so many biographies and the object of so many critical essays, both at home and abroad. This is not a final test of his value, of course, since much of this unusual interest is due to his ill-starred career and to his enigmatic character. He is the only representative here in America of the type to which Villon and Musset belong,—the poets of curious quality who make shipwreck of their

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lives from weakness of will,—who hear opportunity knock at the portal and who hold the door ajar for a moment, only to shut it at last in the face of the gift-bearing visitor. Poe's personality was not engaging, and he was a friendless man, altho in his need many men befriended him. Unfortunate disaster followed fast and followed faster this child of grief, the heir of many a weakness, born out of time and out of place. His life began in somber gloom, and it flickered out in ultimate tragedy. To his contemporaries of threescore years ago, in the thick of the struggles, political and economic, which were to culminate in the Civil War, Poe must have seemed almost a disembodied spirit, living apart in lonely pride. An exotic with no roots in the soil of his nativity, he belonged to another clime than ours in those distant days when the delicacies of pure art could hope for little recognition here. He had to breathe an alien atmosphere; and in all our literary annals, otherwise so pleasant, his is the saddest figure, as it is the strangest.

His fate demanded pity, but it could not compel liking; and this lack of the warmer regard that went out freely to other of our writers may have been due in part to the disquieting reports of his occasional lapses from the social standards which a provincial community feels called upon to sup-

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port strictly. One thing, at least, is admitted by his sharpest censors,—that whatever Poe's failings as a man, he was not lazy or shirking as an artist; he toiled unceasingly, and he did his work in manful fashion, never relaxing into sloth. With the energy of our race, he had also its abundant productivity; and in the scant seventeen years of his literary labors he brought forth the ample prose and verse today collected in ten solid tomes. This we can count to his credit now, even if his immediate associates were excusable for not perceiving it before his scattered writings had been set in order.

As we turn the pages of these volumes we can spy out another reason why he failed to win the cordial liking of his contemporaries. He was no hypocrite; and if he fell from grace now and again, he did not extenuate this by lip-service to the social laws he had broken. He never preacht; and there is no moral purpose, explicit or implicit, to be discovered in his poetry or in his fiction. Indeed, he did not hide a haughty and scornful disdain for the overt didacticism which then dominated American letters. He eschewed ethics and strove to remain outside all morals. He was never immoral, for he was no more sensual than he was sensuous. Questions of conduct did not tempt him to deal with them; and he stood aloof when they were discust. He

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was as solitary in literature as he was in life. The men of his own time in his own country had troubles of their own and struggles of their own; but Poe took his place afar off, as tho he had no interest in these issues. In his lilting lyrics there is no call to arms; and his prose does not nerve a man for the battle of life. Poe is not a large genius; and his appeal, intense as it may be to those who respond to it, is indisputably narrow. His lyre was all his own, but it had only a few chords.

His endowment is as rare as it is restricted. This may be one reason why he has been so contemptuously brusht aside by not a few American critics, otherwise broad-minded. His genius, unquestionable as it may be, does not touch mankind at many points. What he has to say to us, he can utter with direct mastery; but he has very little to communicate. Not only is he without the deeper conceptions of truth and of duty which have sustained and inspired the greater poets in their greatest works, but he has absolutely nothing to offer to all those who look to literature for a rich expression of the realities of life. His spirit dwelt apart, as tho it inhabited an ivory tower hung with purple curtains and topt with banners, yellow, glorious, golden. His soul was remote; it was alien to this work-aday world, peopled with hurrying citizens,

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athirst for the actual. He had no message for mankind, but only this melody for youthful melancholy. His poems and his brief tales lack not only moral purpose, but also spiritual meaning. He was the least myriad-minded of literary artists. He had no sweep of intellectual outlook, no interest in the world of ideas, as he had no interest in the world of affairs. He had no relish for the every-day aspects of life, the very stuff out of which vital literature is made. He turned away from the sturdy creators of character, caring little for Shakspere and less for Molière; indeed, he even boasted that he would give fifty Molières for one La Motte Fouqué.

Mr. Andrew Lang suggested one reason why Poe failed to be taken to the hearts of the American people, when he declared that Poe lackt as a man what his poetry also lackt—humanity. His poetry is not a criticism of life; indeed, it is often a criticism of death, as the same critic has suggested. Death and disease of the body and of the mind: these were the themes he chose. He did not find his material in mankind in its normal moods; rather did he seek out the abnormal, the morbid, the singular, the unprecedented. He is not fairly to be termed inhuman, but he was not quite human in the limitation of his sympathies. It was not the ordinary he enjoyed, but the extraordinary. He did not

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tell men about themselves; he brought from afar reports of startling happenings, and of marvelous mysteries in haunted mansions long ago. Moreover, even if he had a sense of the grotesque, he was devoid of humor, that searching interpreter of humanity; he had no mirth, no laughter, to mingle with his tears.

These are Poe's limitations, frankly stated; and they are sufficient to account fully for his failure to impress widely and deeply the American public, which is healthy-minded and enamored of the realities of life. Yet Poe is what he is in spite of these limitations—and perhaps in part because of them, since they compelled him to concentrate his energy on what was within his reach. No author is without his limitations, even if Poe's are stricter than those of any other writer of equal rank. Within his contracted range he reigns by divine right, a monarch whose rule there is none to dispute. His domain may be only an island; but it is all his own, and what he has therein accomplisht is unique. If art means a mastery of form and proportion, of harmony and color, of design and execution, then Poe is assuredly a true artist with few rivals in dexterity of achievement. If an artist is one who knows what he wants to do, and who knows also how to do it with unfailing certainty, then Poe's position is undeniable. He

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stands forward as one of the most skilful artists of his language and of his century.

Moreover, his art was not accidental or intuitive, as Hawthorne's seems to have been; it was deliberate and conscious. He had a body of literary doctrine, due largely, of course, to his own idiosyncrasies; and these principles he applied continuously. He held that poetry was its own excuse for being, and that it was the rhythmical creation of beauty. He lookt on literature as an art only, as an art and little more, demanding a form as perfect as possible even if its content lackt universality. He had ideas about literary art, even if he had few about anything else; and he delighted in his skilful application of these ideas. Art for Art's sake is a principle that is likely at times to relax into Artifice for the sake of Artifice; and this is a defect from which Poe is not wholly free. But when he is at his best he hides his tools; and he works his magic by intricate spells of which he alone has the secret.

Even those who are deaf to the witchery of his rimes and to the sorcery of his rhythms, who find no fascination in the pallid glances and in the ashen draperies of his spectral muse, ought to be able to admire the architecture of his larger lyrics, the solidity of the framework, and the assured ease with which the manifold effects are controlled and coordinated. By complicated de-

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vices he is sometimes able to attain a final simplicity. Lowell said of one of Poe's poems, that "it seems simple, like a Greek column, because of its perfection." He had at his command all the resources of metrical technic, pause and cadence, assonance and alliteration, refrain and repetend; and these he weaved at will, subtly varying them to bring us strains of ethereal melody, ravishing our ears.

The finest of his lyrics throb with a single and sustained emotion voicing itself in song. His poetry may not be of the highest order; it is not fairly to be compared with that of Spenser or of Hugo, still less with that of mightier masters like Dante and Milton; it has none of their austere inevitability; but it is true poetry of its kind, nevertheless. Even if it is not so broad in its appeal, so deep and so poignant, it is to be classed with the poetry of Coleridge, of Heine and of Musset. It may have been but a scanty plot that Poe was able to cultivate along the steep slopes of twin-peaked Parnassus, but he grew in this little garden flowers of his own, unknown before and soon transplanted into many a distant soil,—*fleurs du mal*, some of them, no doubt, sensitive-plants and marvelous orchids. All can grow these flowers now, for all have got the seed. The note of liquid melody that he had caught from Coleridge, and also in some measure from

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Shelley, he transmitted in his turn to others. Rossetti acknowledged his influence, and Swinburne has felt it even more avowedly. Baudelaire was his disciple, and Mallarmé also. He is one link of a long chain, and not the least significant.

His prose tales may display more of the lesser invention than of the larger imagination; and he may not be happy always in his choice of theme, sometimes attaining only to horror without achieving terror, and racking our nerves when he had hoped to grip our hearts. But even when his subject is not really worthy of his effort, he reveals the same mastery of method, the same power of bathing his narrative in its appropriate atmosphere. He is able always to bestow on a short-story the severity of form and the harmony of color, the unity of effect, the "totality," as he termed it himself, which Hawthorne and Gautier conquered only occasionally and almost accidentally. With resourceful ingenuity, Poe centers the attention of his readers on a single overpowering situation; and thus he is compelled to simplify character and to present it in monochrome outline, subdued to the chosen tone of this special tale. What Lowell called the "serene and somber beauty" of the 'Fall of the House of Usher' must be ascribed largely to its logical construction, its irresistible march along the

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dusky path the author has prescribed. It is due also not a little to the adroit exclusion of every suggestion, and even of every word, not in keeping with the end to be attained at last.

There is in the best of his brief tales a constructive skill, a command of design and a gift of decoration rare in any literature and almost unknown in English, which is often unduly negligent of form. And no one need wonder that Poe's short-stories wandered swiftly out of our language into French and Italian and Spanish, into German and Scandinavian and Bohemian, into strange tongues where no other American author, except Fenimore Cooper, had ever before penetrated. His weird psychologic studies have influenced later writers as unlike as Maupassant and Richepin, Fitzjames O'Brien, Robert Louis Stevenson and Mr. Rudyard Kipling. His tales of a mystery solved at last by observation and deduction have been imitated by Dumas and Sardou, by Gaboriau and Boisgobey, by Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Indeed, the only fictitious character to win international recognition in the final years of the nineteenth century is the reincarnation of a figure first projected by Poe.

Perhaps we may be better able now to answer the questions which seemed puzzling a little earlier. Here in America, Longfellow was taken

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to our hearts because he brought to us the tradition of the old world our forefathers had left long ago; because he was friendly and consoling; because he was the poet of the domestic affections, as Emerson was the poet of national aspirations. We failed to perceive that Poe was no less the heir of the ages than Longfellow, that he was more original and more individual, that he had a stronger and stranger note of his own, destined to echo in distant lands. In like manner we cherisht Hawthorne, because he has a power of sustained narrative, a gift of creating character, a piercing insight into hidden crannies of the human conscience; and we were not annoyed that his "Puritan preoccupation with the moral forces invalidates his purely esthetic appeal"—to borrow an apt phrase from Mr. Brownell. Here again we have failed to see that Poe had a keener intellect, and that he had a firmer mastery of narrative.

We have dumbly recoiled from the result of Poe's withdrawal beyond the realm of morality. His writings have not the richness of substance which comes from an understanding of ethical problems; and this is due partly to his temperament and partly to his resentment against the uninspired didacticism prevalent in American literature half a century ago. Poe did not deal with conduct, and he had therefore only a very

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restricted section of life to present—a section far too restricted for us Americans who look to literature for an explanation of the problems of existence. What Poe had to offer us was what we sorely needed then,—and what we did not know that we needed,—art. He gave us an invaluable example of technical dexterity; and he called attention to the abiding value of perfection of form, adroitness of structure, harmony of detail, and certainty of execution.

Poe's appeal to his own people was limited by his aloofness, by his inability to create character, by his lack of humor,—in a word, by his lack of humanity. And the special qualities of art by which he excelled were precisely what his own people were then least prepared to appreciate. For a full recognition of these artistic excellences the Latins are always apter than the Teutons; and the Latins were early in admiration of Poe's skill. But there is this also to be said, that perhaps not a little of the welcome which Poe has won among the French and the Italians and the Spaniards has been due to those very aspects of his genius which have most prevented his winning a warmer welcome in his own country. He was devoid of humor, but humor is rarely exportable; it is likely to be local in its flavor, and only imperfectly can it be transplanted to another language. He lackt humanity, but a

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narrative of the deeds of dim figures can be transferred easily to distant climes, since these shadows are as much at home in another hemisphere as in ours. He chose often to deal with the abnormal and the morbid, which are less relisht by the direct Americans than by the more sophisticated Europeans. He eschewed overt morality and projected ethereal emanations dwelling in an immaterial world; and this would be more pleasing to the inheritors of the Greek preference for beauty above duty. He shrank from the themes which moved the men of his own country in his own time; and foreigners may have found him easier of approach because he seemed to them unrelated to his native land, unrepresentative of its strenuous aggressiveness.

And now the time has come at last when his own people can afford to learn from foreign nations how to value Poe aright. His deficiencies need not be hidden or diminisht, and there is no profit in denying them; but his individual achievement is equally indisputable. He performed a most useful service to American letters in setting a standard of faithful workmanship and of consummate craftsmanship. His position in the American branch of English literature may not be the highest of all, but it is lofty enough; and it is beyond question.

(1909.)

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FENIMORE COOPER

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[This address was delivered at the centenary of the incorporation of Cooperstown, on August 8, 1907.]

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XI

FENIMORE COOPER

IT is with keen pleasure that an American man of letters accepts the privilege of commemorating again the genius of Fenimore Cooper, the earliest of our authors to be widely read beyond the boundaries of our own language, as Irving, his elder contemporary, was the earliest to win attention outside the borders of our own land. It is well for us that the first American novelist to reveal American character to the nations of Europe was himself stalwart in his own Americanism, full of the faith that sustains us all. As Parkman declared, "Cooper's genius drew aliment from the soil where God had planted it, and rose to a vigorous growth, rough and gnarled, but strong as a mountain cedar." And as Lowell finely phrased it, Cooper "lookt about him to recognize in the New Man of the New World an unhackneyed and unconventional subject for art"; he "studied from the life, and it was the *homo Americanus*, with our own limestone in

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his bones, and our own iron in his blood, that sat to him."

The American whom Cooper painted in his pages is the American in the making; and it is the earlier makers of America that he has depicted with sympathetic sincerity,—the soldier, the sailor, the settler, the backwoodsman, self-reliant types all of them, that gave no false impression of us to the rest of the world. In thus portraying the sturdy men who made possible the nation as we know it to-day, he performed a splendid service to the country he loved devotedly. His service to our literature is equally obvious. He wrote the first American historical novel, which remains to this day one of the best. He was the first to venture a story of the sea; and no one of the writers who have followed in his wake has yet equaled his earlier attempt. He was the first to tell tales of the frontier, of the backwoods, and of the prairie. He stands forth even now the foremost representative in fiction of the United States as a whole,—for Hawthorne, a more delicate artist in romance, is of his section all compact, and his genius lackt fit sustenance when its tentacles did not cling to the stony New England of his birth. Well might Bryant declare that the glory which Cooper "justly won was reflected on his country, of whose literary independence he was the pioneer."

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I

"THERE is no life of a man faithfully recorded," so Carlyle has declared, "but is a heroic poem of its sort, rimed or unrimed." The life of Cooper has been faithfully recorded by Professor Lounsbury, in the best biography yet devoted to any American man of letters. Cooper was born in New Jersey in 1789, just after the United States had adopted the constitution which has given stability to our government. When he was only a year old he was brought to Cooperstown, where he was to die threescore years later. His far-seeing and open-minded father had settled more acres than any other man in America; and forty thousand souls held under him, directly or indirectly, most of them along the shores of the Susquehanna, the crooked river, "to which," as Cooper tells us, "the Atlantic herself had extended an arm in welcome." It was at Cooperstown that the future novelist past his childhood, "with the vast forest around him," so Bryant asserted, "stretching up the mountains that overlook the lake, and far beyond, in a region where the Indian yet roamed, and the white hunter, half-Indian in his dress and mode of life, sought his game,—a region in which the bear and the wolf were yet hunted, and the panther, more formidable than either, lurkt in the thickets."

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In due season he was sent to school at Albany; and then he entered Yale, only to be dismist before he had completed his course. Thus it was that he lackt the chastening influence of the prescribed program of studies, narrow enough in those days and yet broadening to all who knew how to profit by it. His own college never made up to him for what may have been her mistake or his own; but a score of years later Columbia honored herself by granting him the degree of master of arts. As a preparation for the navy, Cooper made a long voyage to Europe before the mast; and on his return he was appointed a midshipman. He remained in the service only three years. He was on the *Vesuvius* for a season; he was one of a party that went to Oswego to build a brig on Lake Ontario, then girt in by the primeval forest; and he was, for a while, left in command of the gunboats on Lake Champlain; and all these posts gave him a knowledge of his native land and of its conditions which was to stand him in good stead later when he turned novelist. Afterward he was ordered to the *Wasp*, where he served under the heroic Lawrence. But there seemed then no immediate likelihood of war; so Cooper married and resigned his commission.

His father and his wife's father were well to do; and for nearly ten years Cooper was con-

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tent to live the placid life of a country gentleman, sometimes at Cooperstown and sometimes in Westchester, near New York. He reached the age of thirty, not only without having written anything, but even without any special interest in literature; and when at last he did take a first step into authorship, it was in the most casual fashion. Throwing down a contemporary British novel of slight value, he exprest the belief that he could write a better book himself. Encouraged by his wife, he completed a story of British manners and customs, about which he knew little or nothing from personal observation. But so complete was our American subservience to the British branch of our literature that this did not seem strange then, even to Cooper, an American of the Americans. This first novel, 'Precaution,' was publisht without his name; it was even reprinted in England, where it was reviewed with no suspicion that it had not been written by an Englishman. However insignificant in itself, this book revealed to its author that he could tell a story.

It is a commonplace of criticism that novelists flower late. Fielding and Scott, Thackeray and Hawthorne, had spent at least half of the allotted threescore years and ten before they blossomed forth as novelists,—as tho to exemplify the Arab proverb that no man is called of

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God until he is forty. But Fielding and Scott, Thackeray and Hawthorne, had been writing abundantly, from their youth up, plays and poems, sketches and short-stories, whereas Cooper had served no such apprenticeship to literature. But when he had once tasted ink, he enjoyed it; and in the remaining half of his life he revealed the ample productivity of a rich and abundant genius. Toward the end of the next year—1821—he publisht the 'Spy,' followed swiftly by the 'Pioneers' and by the 'Pilot'; and by these three books his fame was firmly establisht in his own country, in Great Britain, and all over Europe, where he was hailed as a worthy rival of Scott. In these three books he made good his triple claim to remembrance as a teller of tales, as a creator of character, and as a poet.

The 'Spy' was followed in time by another tale of the American Revolution, 'Lionel Lincoln,' wherein, so Bancroft has testified, "he has described the Battle of Bunker Hill better than it is described in any other work." It was accompanied later by other historical novels, some of them dealing with themes in European history,—the 'Bravo,' for one, and the 'Headsman,' for another,—good stories in their way, but without the solid support which a novelist has when he deals with his own people and his own time.

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The 'Pioneers' was made more important by the composition of four other Leatherstocking Tales, completing the interesting drama in five acts, which culminates at last in the simple hero's death, told with manly pathos. The 'Pilot' had in its track the 'Red Rover' and eight other tales of the sea; and it was also succeeded in time by a 'History of the American Navy' and by a series of 'Lives of Naval Officers,' in which Cooper proved his loyalty to his first profession.

Perhaps it is not strange that he who could describe fighting with contagious interest should not himself shrink from controversy. Cooper was large-hearted, but he was also hot-headed and thin-skinned. A high-minded man beyond all question, he was high-tempered also, generally opinionated and occasionally irascible. In his travels in Europe he had been quick to repel ignorant aspersion against his native land; and on his return home he had not hesitated to point out the failings and the faults of his fellow-citizens, not always with the suavity which persuades to a change of heart. Bitterly attackt in the newspapers, he defended himself with his pen and in the courts of law. That he was meanly assailed by mean men is shown by the fact that he was successful in the several libel-suits he brought against his traducers. But the echoes of these "old, unhappy, far-off things

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and battles long ago" have died away now these many years, and they need not be recalled. Cooper was independent and uncompromising; "his character," so Bryant asserted, "was like the bark of the cinnamon, a rough and astringent rind without, and an intense sweetness within."

Altho these needless disputes may have saddened the later years of his life, he was happy in his family and in his friends, whom he bound to him with hoops of steel. These friends, with Bryant and Irving at the head of them, were making ready for a public dinner to testify the high esteem in which they held him, when they heard that his health had begun to fail. He was then contemplating a sixth Leatherstocking Tale; but he did not live to start on his new story. And it was at Cooperstown that he died, in the fall of 1851, on the last day of his sixty-second year.

II

FAME has its tides, its flood and its ebb, like the ocean; and the author who is lifted high by a wave of popularity is certain in time to sink into the trough of the sea, perhaps to be raised aloft again by a later billow. The fame of Cooper soared after his first successes, only to

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fall away sadly during the later controversies. It was proclaimed again by Bryant and Bancroft and Parkman in the stress of emotion evoked by his sudden death, only to be obscured once more in the twoscore years that followed, as other literary fashions came into favor. Now, at last, in this new century it has emerged once more, solidly establisht on its real merits and not likely again to be called in question. Time has made its unerring choice from out his many books, selecting those which are most representative of his genius at its finest. It is by its peaks that we measure the height of a mountain, and not by its foot-hills and its valleys. Irving had Cooper in mind when he remarked that "in life they judge a writer by his last production; after death by what he has done best." No author can go down to posterity with a baggage-wagon full of his complete works; he can descend that long trail laden only with what will go in the saddle-bags.

Cooper is a born story-teller; and the kind of story he excels in is the tale of adventure, peopled with vital and veracious characters, having a life of their own, independent of the situations in which they may chance to be actors. Of this kind of story the 'Odyssey' is the earliest example, as it is the greatest. Professor Trent is only just when he insists that Cooper lifted "the

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story of adventure into the realms of poetry." Even tho he is denied the gift of verse, he is essentially a poet; but he is no Vergil, no Racine, interested in his manner as much as in his matter, and joying in craftsmanship for its own sake. It may be acknowledged at once that he is not a flawless artist, never quitting his work till he has made it as perfect as he can; and his best books are not always kept up to their highest level. He had the largeness of affluent genius, and also the carelessness which often accompanies this, such as we may observe in Scott and even in Shakspere, rich creators of character, in whose works there is much that we could desire to be different and not a little that we could wish away.

As his devoted daughter admitted loyally, "he never was, in the sense of studied preparation, an artist in the composition of a work of fiction. He wrote, as it were, from the inspiration of the moment." But even in this improvisation his native gift of narrative did not desert him. "It is easy to find fault with the 'Last of the Mohicans,'" said Parkman; "but it is far from easy to rival or even approach its excellence. The book has the genuine game-flavor; it exhales the odors of the pine-woods and the freshness of the mountain wind." In this story, as in others, the author may be sluggish in starting, over-

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leisurely in exposition, not always plausible in the motives assigned for the entanglement in which his creatures are immesht; he may be inconsistent now and then; but these are minor defects, forgotten when the tale tightens to the tensity of drama. Then the interest is beyond all question; and we cannot choose but hear. We read on, not merely to learn what is to happen next, but to know more about the characters as they reveal themselves under the stress of danger. We are not mere spectators looking on idly; we are made to see the thing as it is; we feel ourselves almost participants in the action; breathless, delighted, convinced, we are carried along by the sheer power of the writer.

There are two reasons why Cooper has come into his own later than was his right, and why full recognition of his genius has been delayed. The first is a consequence of the enduring vogue of realism, which has failed to perceive that he was one of its precursors, and which has no relish for his more evident romanticism. Yet sharp-eyed critics ought to have been able to see that Cooper's detailed descriptions of customs and of costumes, when these were truly characteristic and needful to relate the character to the background, set a pattern for Balzac; the romanticist thus serving as a stimulus to the realist. They might even have noted that Cooper is a

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romanticist who is often a realist, just as Balzac is a realist who is often a romanticist. In all later fiction there are no more sternly truthful characters than Natty Bumppo and Long Tom Coffin; and tho the method of their presentation is not so modern, they can withstand comparison with Huckleberry Finn and Silas Lapham, with Colonel Newcome and old Goriot.

A second reason for the tardiness of Cooper's recognition may be found in the fact that the vicissitudes of literary reputation seem to be more or less dependent on the historians of literature; and, as it happens, Cooper's deficiencies as a writer are of a kind obnoxious to the ordinary literary critics, who are rarely broad-minded or keen-sighted enough to perceive beneath his more obvious defects the larger merits, clear enough to the plain people, who are insensitive to the lesser blemishes that send shivers down the spine of the dilettant. These critics are not moved by his fundamental force, which the plain people feel fully, while they are acutely sensitive to his lapses from literary conventions and traditions. Cooper came to story-telling late, with little experience in writing. He was not at all bookish; he was not a man of the library, but a man of the open air,—of the ocean and of the forest. In a sense, he was not a man of letters at all; he was interested not so

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much in literature as in life itself. And we must recall the pitiful fact also that there are always fastidious criticasters who think that whatever wins wide popularity must be poor stuff,—ignorant that nearly all the really great writers have achieved indisputable popularity while they were alive to enjoy it.

Cooper's lack of early training cannot be gainsaid; and therefore his style appeals but little to those who cherish a rare word for its own sake and who delight in verbal marquetry. Even if he is essentially a poet, he is no sonneteer, polishing his lines until he can see his own image in them. He is careless of the rules of rhetoric,—sometimes unforgivably careless. Even in grammar he was no purist, no precisian; and his use of words is not always defensible, even if it is an overstatement of the case to charge him with "linguistic astigmatism." But if there is clumsy writing in his pages, this is never the result of the failure of any attempt at fine writing. Awkward he may be at times, but he is always sincere and direct; he is always unpretentious and simple. He has something to say, and he says it so as to stamp "on the mind of the reader the impression he desired to convey." He achieves the primary object of all good writings, in that he makes himself clearly understood, even if he sometimes fails to attain the secondary purpose

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of giving added pleasure by the mere expression. In describing nature and in depicting character, his style is nervous and unerring; and it can rise on occasion into genuine eloquence. When Bryant first read the 'Pioneers,' he declared that here was "the poet of rural life in this country"; and Parkman praised the vigor and the fidelity of Cooper's descriptions of scenery, insisting that they who cannot feel the efficiency of his "strong picturing have neither heart nor mind for the grandeur of the outer world."

After admitting that Cooper is not beyond reproach for an occasional laxity in his style, for an occasional stiffness in his dialog, and for an occasional prolixity in his narrative, it may be as well to add that sometimes he fatigues himself and his readers in the search for comic relief. Even Scott is not infrequently tedious in his minor characters meant to be laught at; and as Cooper lackt Scott's real richness of humor, he is tiresome more often and at greater length. There are passages of admirable humor scattered here and there in Cooper's pages, seemingly unconscious, most of them; and there are quaint characters sketcht with a delightful appreciation of their absurdities. But it must be confest that when he sets out to be funny by main strength, he is plainly joking with difficulty. It is as tho he thrust his hand into the grab-bag of our va-

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riegated humanity, willing to take whatever his fingers might find, whether it was truly a prize like his great creations or only a wooden doll drest like a figure of fun.

Perhaps this may account in some measure for the flatness of a few of his female characters. He can draw women sympathetically, altho some of his heroines are a little colorless. The wife of Ishmael Bush, the squatter, mother of seven stalwart sons and sister of a murderous rascal, is an unforgetable portrait, solidly painted by a master; and Dew-of-June, the girl-wife of the treacherous Arrowhead, a primitive type but eternally feminine, is depicted with equal art. Judith and Hetty, the supposed daughters of the bucaneer, are real and vivid and womanly, both of them. It is to be remembered also that women must ever play a minor part in the tale of adventure, since the bolder experiences in life are not fit for gentle and clinging heroines; and more often than not Cooper presents them with a kind of chivalric aloofness.

These adverse criticisms need not detain us. There is no denying that there are weak spots in Cooper's works; and there is no advantage in seeking to disguise this or to gloss it over. Cooper is what he is,—even if he is not what he is not. He is a teller of tales, a creator of character, a poet; and in his chosen form he has left

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more than one masterpiece. Very few masterpieces are absolutely free from defects; but defects, however obvious and however numerous, have never prevented the ultimate appreciation of a masterpiece.

III

THAT Cooper was able to leave more than one masterpiece behind him was due mainly, of course, to his own genius, but it was the consequence also of a singular piece of luck. It was his good fortune to take up novel-writing at the precise moment in the history of the art of fiction when one of his predecessors had just provided him with the exact model he needed, and when another had just revealed the richness of the material that lay ready to his hand. 1820, the year in which his imitation of a British novel had proved to him that he could at least tell a story, even tho his subject might be alien to all his interests, was also the year in which Scott sent forth 'Ivanhoe' and in which Irving completed the 'Sketch Book,' containing 'Rip van Winkle' and the 'Legend of Sleepy Hollow.' Scott supplied Cooper with the mold into which he could pour whatever he might have to express; and Irving disclosed the unsuspected possibilities of romance in American life, which had

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hitherto been deemed too barren and too bare for the creative artist to attempt. Irving's delightful tales may have drawn Cooper's attention to the kind of matter he could deal with most satisfactorily, while Scott's historical novel certainly indicated the manner in which he might handle it most advantageously. That author is lucky who finds a formula ready to his hand and fit for the work he wants to do, as that author is unfortunate who has no inspiring model. Perhaps we have here a reason why one of Cooper's forerunners, Charles Brockden Brown, a man of undeniable endowment, was able to leave so little that today abides in our memories. He had before him only the unsatisfactory fictions of Mrs. Radcliffe and of Godwin; and it is an interesting speculation to inquire whether he might not have rivaled Cooper if he had lived a score of years later and had written only after Scott had devised the historical novel.

The formula of the historical novel as Scott declared it, with its core of romanticism and its casing of realism, was pleasing to the many-headed and many-minded public; and it was seized upon at once by other novelists in other countries. It was the formula which exactly fitted the kindred genius of Cooper, who also had the native gift of story-telling and the power of presenting simple and primitive character.

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Both the romantic and the realistic elements of Scott's framework appealed strongly to Cooper, who had the same rapidity of action, the same inventiveness of situation, the same command of pathos, even tho his human sympathy might be less broad and his humor far less abundant. But Cooper never imitated Scott slavishly. He found in Scott's stories a pattern fit for his use, and he availed himself of it, modifying it freely. He did in America very much what Hugo and Dumas were to do in France, and Manzoni in Italy; he borrowed the loom set up by the Scotch novelist, only to weave on it a web of his own coloring.

Scott is generally considered as a historical novelist; but Cooper's historical novels are not his chief title to fame. In fact, the best of them are scarcely to be classed at all as historical novels in the narrower sense, since they do not seek to evoke the manners and the men of long ago. The 'Spy' and the 'Pilot' deal with the American Revolution; and this was hardly more remote from Cooper than were the Napoleonic wars from Thackeray when he wrote 'Vanity Fair,' which we accept now rather as a picture of society contemporary with the author than as a historical novel. True romance does not require the remoteness of the past; and it is not the real artist, but the magic-lantern operator,

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who has to have the room darkened before he can display his pictures from life. The Revolutionary conflict had come to a happy conclusion less than twoscore years before Cooper chose to put it into fiction, and he had many friends who were survivors of the strife. That war was nearer to him than the Civil War is to us today. There was no strain of the imagination needful before he could put himself back in the times that tried men's souls.

IV

THE 'Pilot' is like the 'Spy' in that it is a novel of the American Revolution, altho its scenes are not on the land, but on the ocean mainly, and also in that the nameless hero is a seemingly enigmatic yet fundamentally simple character like the darkly glimpst figure of Harvey Birch. Altho the 'Pilot' is the result of a desire to deal more effectively with life on the blue water than had been accomplisht in the 'Pirate,' no story of Cooper's more clearly reveals his real independence of Scott. The manner may be more or less similar; but the matter is wholly unlike, and so is the point of view. Scott is a landsman, a dweller in court-rooms and libraries; Cooper is a sailor, a man of the ocean, with a tang of the salt air in him. When he sailed be-

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fore the mast in the merchant marine, he bunkt with the able seamen in the forecastle, and he knew them thru and thru; and when he received his commission in the navy, he gained an equal intimacy with the officers of the ward-room. When he set out to tell the first sea-tale ever attempted, he was writing out of the fulness of knowledge and he was accomplishing a labor of love.

It is not easy for us now to perceive that the 'Pilot' was a most daring experiment in fiction. No one had ever ventured to lay a story boldly on the sea and to seek for interest in the handling of a ship. Now and again, it is true, an episode or two of a novel had taken place on the ocean; and storms at sea had tempted the pens of the poets. But the novelists and the poets were landsmen, all of them; and they could not choose but take the landsman's attitude of dread rather than the sailor's attitude of delight. They had never felt the joy of the seaman, when the wind blows high and the giant surges sweep ahead, and there is no land within a hundred leagues. Cooper was a novelist and a poet and also a sailorman; he knew ships because he had lived in them and loved them; he knew seamen because he had lived with them and appreciated their special qualities.

There is a storm in the 'Odyssey'; but Homer

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was a landsman who lookt at the sea with the eyes of a landsman, even if he may have made a few coasting trips between the mainland and the isles of Greece. There is a storm in the 'Æneid' also; but Vergil achieved only a studio-piece, a cento from the Greek poets. Robinson Crusoe, mariner of York, was wreckt by a gale and cast away; but altho Defoe had crost the Channel and had perhaps even braved the Bay of Biscay, he dealt with the storm only as a device to get his hero alone on an island. Smollett had been a surgeon's mate in the navy, and had sailed the Western Ocean; but his eye was open only for the strange humors of seafaring men, and there is no love for the sea in any of his comic chronicles, no understanding of its might and its mystery. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre had gone on long voyages in distant waters, and he was able to call up a tornado to make an end of Paul and Virginia; but he was only an artist in emotional description; he did not know the sea and love it as a sailor knows it and loves it. Scott, in the 'Pirate,' had proved again the landsman's incapacity to get full value out of a sea-theme; and it was this story of Scott's which moved Cooper to undertake the 'Pilot.'

Here at last was the real thing, a story of the ocean, of vessels manuvring, of sailors as they

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are,—the work of a sailor who was also a teller of tales, a creator of character, a poet. Here was the formula to be handed down to those who might come after, to Melville and to Marryat,—good story-tellers, both of them, but lacking Cooper's double experience as a sailor before the mast in a merchant vessel and as an officer on the quarter-deck of a man-of-war. The very novelty of the 'Pilot,' its originality, seemed to the author's friends dangerous, and they discouraged him. Perhaps this is the reason why the story is a little slow in getting under way, and why the author sometimes tacks more than once before coming to close quarters. There are a few scenes on land, far less interesting than those at sea. But how sympathetically the character of Long Tom Coffin is presented! How vigorous and how humorous is the pinning of the British officer to the mast by Long Tom's harpoon! How superb is the account of the ship working off-shore in a gale! It is no wonder that the French naval historian, Admiral Jurien de la Gravière, declared that "he could never read it without his pulse thrilling again with the joy of seamanship."

Heartened by the cordial acceptance of this first sea-tale, Cooper soon spun another yarn, the 'Red Rover,' the action of which was laid wholly on the ocean,—after the opening chapters. In

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none of his novels does Cooper better display his mastery of narrative and his power of sustaining interest. Thereafter he could not long be kept away from salt water; he wrote sea-tale after sea-tale, until there were half-a-score of them, setting forth the most varied aspects of the unstable element. In 'Wing-and-Wing' he skirted the lovely shores of the Mediterranean; and in the 'Two Admirals' he set in array a goodly fleet on the Atlantic. Altho these ten sea-tales are not all of equal excellence, they are all proofs of his love for life afloat, of his insight into the shifting moods of nature, and of his understanding of the hardy men who go down to the sea in ships. They all reveal his ability to make the average reader perceive and enjoy technical operations. They are all more or less toucht with the poetry of the sea and instinct with the gliding grace of the vessels themselves. Cooper's ships live,—so Admiral Mahan has informed us; "they are handled as ships then were, and act as ships still would act under the circumstances." And the historian of sea-power holds that the water is "a noble field for the story-teller, for of all inanimate objects, a sailing ship in her vivid movement most nearly simulates life."

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V

"COOPER of the wood and wave," as Stevenson affectionately termed him, is not more at home on the ocean than he is in the forest. Fine as are the sea-tales, they are surpassed in power and in popularity by the five stories in which the career of Leatherstocking is traced from youth to old age. In the character typified in Leatherstocking, Lowell found "the protagonist of our New World epic, a figure as poetic as that of Achilles, as ideally representative as that of Don Quixote, as romantic in relation to our homespun and plebeian myths as Arthur in his to his mailed and plumed cycle of chivalry." And Thackeray declared that while he liked Scott's manly and unassuming heroes, he thought Cooper's were quite their equals, and that "perhaps Leatherstocking is better than any one in Scott's lot. La Longue Carabine is one of the great prizemen of fiction. He ranks with your Uncle Toby, Sir Roger de Coverley, Falstaff—heroic figures all, American or British; and the artist has deserved well of his country who devised him." Perhaps there is no better proof of Cooper's genuine power than that he can insist on Leatherstocking's goodness,—a dangerous gift for a novelist to bestow on a man,—and that he can show us

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Leatherstocking declining the advances of a handsome woman,—a dangerous position for a novelist to put a man in,—without making any reader think Leatherstocking a prig. We believe in his simple-minded goodness; and he keeps our sympathy in his rejection of Judith as in Mabel's rejection of him.

Cooper was shrewd in his judgment of his own works; and he said himself that "if anything from the pen of the writer of these romances is at all to outlive himself, it is unquestionably the series of the Leatherstocking Tales." For the deserved popularity of this series, abiding now nearly threescore years since the author's death, there are many reasons besides the noble simplicity and the sturdy veracity of the central character. There are other figures as fresh and as real. There is Hurry Harry; there is Ishmael Bush;—both of them necessary types of men bred on the border. There are Chingachgook and Uncas and Hardheart, good men and true. There is all the glamor of frontier life, now faded forever. There is the underlying poetry of the unbroken forest and of the sweeping prairie, of the broad lakes and of the rapid streams. There are linkt adventures of breathless interest, studded with moments of poignant emotion,—the death-grip of the wounded Indian over the falls, in the 'Last of the Mohicans'; the implacable execution

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of the traitor, in the 'Prairie'; and many another in the other tales, scarcely less tense with tragedy. There is the rich gift of narrative; there are vigor and accuracy of description. There is unfailing fertility of invention; and there is also the larger interpreting imagination. There are pictures of resourcefulness in the presence of danger, and of courage in the face of death. There is unstrained pathos. And behind all these things, there is the author himself, delighting in his work and sustaining his story by his manly wisdom and his elemental force.

There would be no need to say more about this series, if it had not been attackt for one of its most salient characteristics,—for its presentation of the red men with whom the white men of the forest and of the prairie were ever at war. Scorn has been heaped high on Cooper's Indians; they have been denounced as wooden images, fit only to stand outside cigar-stores; and they have been described as belonging to "an extinct tribe that never existed." The first of these criticisms may be dismist as foolish; whether true or false, Chingachgook and Uncas and Hardheart are alive. The color on their cheeks is not redder than the blood in their veins. Just as West, when he first beheld the Apollo Belvedere, was made to think of a Mohawk brave, so Longfellow, at a performance of Corneille's 'Cid' by

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the Comédie-française, was reminded of Cooper's Indians "by its rude power, and a certain force and roughness." The second charge, however, that they are not taken from life, calls for consideration. Parkman, for example (to be cited always with the utmost respect), held Cooper's Indians to be false to the fact as he had seen it himself. But the aborigines have been studied more sympathetically in the sixty years that have elapsed since Parkman trampt the Oregon trail; and our riper knowledge has now revealed a poetry in the red man and a picturesqueness very like those with which Cooper endowed him.

It is often assumed that we are indebted to Cooper for the idealized "noble savage," whom Rousseau evolved from his inner consciousness, and who is as remote as possible from the real man at any stage of his social evolution. But this noble savage is not to be discovered anywhere in Cooper's stories. As Mr. Brownell has recently pointed out, Cooper does not at all idealize the red man: "in general, he endows the Indian with traits which would be approved even by the ranchman, the rustler, or the army officer." And his Indians are the result of early intimacy and of conscientious study. His daughter has told us how he followed the frequent Indian delegations from town to town, observing them carefully, conversing with them freely,

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and imprest "with the vein of poetry and of laconic eloquence marking their brief speeches."

If there is any lack of faithfulness in Cooper's presentation of the Indian character, it is due to the fact that he was a romancer, and therefore an optimist, bent on making the best of things. He told the truth as he saw it, and nothing but the truth; but he did not always tell the whole truth. The Indian was rising from savagery into barbarism, with all that this implies; and Cooper puts before us the Indian's courage and his fortitude, leaving more or less in the shadow the Indian's ferocity and his cruelty. That this was Cooper's intent is plain from a passage in the preface to the Leatherstocking Tales, wherein he declares that "it is the privilege of all writers of fiction, more particularly when their works aspire to the elevation of romances, to present the beau-ideal of their characters to the reader. This it is which constitutes poetry, and to suppose that the red man is to be represented only in the squalid misery or in the degraded state that certainly more or less belongs to his condition, is, we apprehend, taking a very narrow view of an author's privileges." Here again Cooper was akin to Scott, who chose to dwell only on the bright side of chivalry and to picture the merry England of Richard Lionheart as a pleasanter period to live in than it could have

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been in reality. Cooper's red men are probably closer to the actual facts than Scott's black knights and white ladies. And when all is said, Chingachgook and Uncas and Hardheart, even if not completely truthful, justify themselves; they linger long in the memory; they stand forth boldly, for their author has breathed into them the breath of life.

VI

PARKMAN might find fault with the validity of Cooper's Indians, but he had been taken captive by their vitality. There was a time when the historian was "so identified with the novelist's red heroes that he dreamed of them." Just as it was the reading of Scott's romances which stirred Thierry to write the history of the Norman Conquest, so it was the reading of Cooper's romances which started Parkman on his life-long task, the history of the protracted struggle between France and England here in America. Probably it was Cooper also, quite as much as Parkman, who moved another American historian to narrate the successive stages of the 'Winning of the West'; and Mr. Roosevelt has been glad always to testify to the stern reality of Cooper's steadfast borderers.

This reveals to us that underlying the Leatherstocking Tales, and bestowing significance upon

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them, is the fact that they set forth imaginary episodes in a real struggle, in that long conflict between two opposing civilizations, which looms larger than any mere war and which has true epic grandeur in the clash of contending racial ideals. This is what lends to the Leatherstocking Tales their largeness; and this is what gives them their major meaning for us. They help to explain how it was that these United States came to be what they are.

Cooper has told us, in the introduction to the 'Spy,' that after he had publisht his empty imitation of a British novel, it became a matter of reproach among his friends that "he, an American in heart as in birth," should have depicted "a state of society so different from that to which he belonged." This reproach it was which moved him to undertake the 'Spy,' in which "he chose patriotism for his theme." And patriotism is the theme of all his greater books.

Cooper was intensely American in his feeling, and yet broadly cosmopolitan in his outlook on the world. Not for nothing had he been an officer in the American navy, and also a long sojourner in Europe. He had a noble detachment from all that was petty and temporary. In his novels he is curiously fair to all manner of foreigners, possessing apparently the subtle sympathy which gives understanding. And here he

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stands in striking contrast with only too many of his countrymen fourscore years ago, who were at one and the same time provincial in their boastfulness and colonial in their subservient deference to the opinion of the mother-country. Cooper was stanchly patriotic; "with him," so Professor Lounsbury tells us, "love of country was not a sentiment, it was a passion." Perhaps because of his unbounded faith in the future of his native land, he was not blind to her present faults; and while he "defended his country from detractors abroad,"—to borrow Bryant's apt phrase,—"he sought to save her from flatterers at home."

The elder Dana dwelt upon Cooper's "self-reliance and civic courage, which would with equal freedom speak out in the face of the people, whether they were friendly or adverse." Civic courage is a virtue none too common, even nowadays; and Cooper possest it in a high degree. It needs to be noted also that Cooper's opinions upon public matters were not casual or freakish; they were founded on principle. He had given careful consideration to the affairs of state; and he had a political philosophy of his own, more solidly buttrest than we can discover in the equipment of any other writer of romance of this century, whether American or European. Recall the thinness of Dickens's political theories, for

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example, or of Hawthorne's. Even Hugo's are found on analysis to be vague and fantastic. "Cooper's politics," as Mr. Brownell has reminded us, "are rational, discriminating and suggestive. He knew men as Lincoln knew them—which is to say very differently from Dumas and Stevenson." There is no demand on any of us that we shall accept Cooper's political theories, or reduce them to a system. It is enough that he had a body of doctrine, complete and clear, which gives to his fiction a certain solidity lacking in that of all the others who have undertaken the tale of adventure.

It is the triple duty of the novelist and of the dramatist to make us see, to make us feel, and to make us think. Cooper succeeded in making his readers think, even tho they might resent it, because he had done his own thinking in advance. And his thinking had not been done in a vacuum; he was not only shrewd and sagacious, he had also an immense variety of information, not merely upon the ocean and the forest, but upon subjects as remote as horticulture and agriculture and stock-raising. His friends were "struck with the inexhaustible vivacity of his conversation and the minuteness of his knowledge in everything which depended upon acuteness of observation and exactness of recollection."

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VII

WHEN all is said, Cooper stands forth a large man, in himself, in his work, and in the range of his influence. If we may judge an author by the number of those he has stimulated, Cooper must take high rank. He has stirred a host of other writers, often men who pursued wholly different artistic ideals. He drew from Balzac "roars of pleasure and admiration"; and Dumas avowedly imitated him in the 'Mohicans of Paris.' Mr. Kipling once remarked to me, after a rereading of Cooper, that he had come across scene after scene which he knew already in the narratives of later novelists, and that a host of later writers had been going to Cooper's works, as to a storehouse of effective situations where they could help themselves, so fertile in invention was the earlier American author. Even Thackeray did not disdain to borrow from him the hint of one of his noblest chapters; and Poe may have taken over the suggestion for the method of his marvelously acute M. Dupin from the skill with which Cooper's redskins followed a trail blind to eyes less acute than theirs.

A poet, a teller of tales which moved many others to imitation and from which many others might borrow, he was above all else a creator of characters, which could not be taken from him.

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It is by the characters he brings into being that a novelist survives; and it is by this test that he must abide. And certain of the wisest critics of the nineteenth century have testified to Cooper's power of giving life to creatures that the world will not willingly let die. Lowell made sure that Natty Bumppo

> Won't go to oblivion quicker
> Than Adams the parson and Primrose the vicar.

Sainte-Beuve declared that Cooper possest that "creative faculty which brings into the world new characters, and by virtue of which Rabelais produced Panurge; Le Sage, Gil Blas; and Richardson, Pamela." There can be no higher praise than this. Cooper deserved it; and by so doing, as Thackeray said, he deserved well of his country.

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BRONSON HOWARD

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XII

BRONSON HOWARD

THE untimely death of Bronson Howard before he had attained to the allotted threescore years and ten, broke a friendship which had begun very shortly after I had been present at the first night of 'Saratoga,' his earliest successful play, now nearly forty years ago. Only the few whom he had admitted to intimacy could know what his friendship meant to all who were fortunate enough to possess it. But even casual acquaintances must have felt drawn toward him by his cheery simplicity of manner. Perhaps even those who saw him only on occasion, may have noted in him a certain elemental largeness; and they could not fail to find him at once genial and direct, kindly and manly. He was a delightful talker, shrewd and sagacious, and yet easy and wholly without pretense. He did his own thinking; but he never forced his opinions on others. He was the soul of courtesy; and witty as he was, he never riskt the loss of his friend for the sake of his jest. He sought always to

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maintain the dignity of his calling; and he was held in high regard by all his colleags of the craft. He was the founder of the American Dramatists Club, following in the footsteps of Beaumarchais, who organized the French Dramatic Authors Society, and of Scribe, who reorganized it; and under Bronson Howard's leadership this association succeeded in securing an extension of the legal protection for stage-right here in the United States broader than that yet granted by any other nation.

His career as a dramatist was long and honorable. It was also extraordinarily successful;—indeed, it would be difficult to name any playwright who had scored so many hits, most of them bull's-eyes, with so few misses. Altho he conformed to the stage-conventions of his own day, he was original and independent. He made no translations or adaptations, with the single exception of 'Wives,' a *contaminatio* (as the Latins would term it) of two of Molière's comedies—the 'School for Husbands' and the 'School for Wives.' He collaborated only twice, first with Sir Charles Young (the author of 'Jim the Penman'), and second with a younger American man of letters; and in neither case were these plays in partnership as well received by the public as the most of those which he had written alone. Yet he believed heartily in collaboration,

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holding that in the arduous work of construction, on which a drama must depend, two heads are better than one. And he was an ideal collaborator himself, considerate and suggestive, bringing to the joint work his rich experience and his quick inventiveness. And only the intimacy of collaboration could reveal completely his abiding sincerity and his desire for truth, combined with his innate feeling for theatrical effectiveness and his intuitive understanding of the actor's art, which every playwright must needs possess, if he hopes to see what he has conceived in the silence of the study take on life and movement in the glare of the stage.

He graduated from journalism into play-writing, as Mr. Augustus Thomas and Mr. George Ade have done since. He was the earliest American playwright (not also an actor or a manager) to make his living by writing for the theater. Before he began his career, an American comedy was something casual, accidental, sporadic; it could be only amateur work. He was the first professional dramatist, giving his whole life to his work. He blazed the trail for the dozen or the score of authors who are now seeking to set on the stage the salient characteristics of American life. He was the first American playwright who had a recognized position in Great Britain; and we may regard him as the scout of that

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friendly invasion which has resulted recently in the simultaneous occupancy of half-a-dozen London theaters by pieces of American authorship.

His earlier plays suffered a sea-change in crossing the Atlantic, and were adapted by British writers to conform to British manners and customs. 'Saratoga' was condensed and localized by Frank Marshall, who renamed it 'Brighton.' The 'Banker's Daughter' was transformed by James Alberry, and called 'The Old Love and the New.' The American author himself modified 'Hurricanes' for London audiences and gave it a new title, 'Truth.' In time, the London managers found that the London playgoers were outgrowing the insularity which had insisted on the adapting of exotic plays to British conditions; and therefore 'Young Mrs. Winthrop' and the 'Henrietta' were presented in England as they had been performed in America. Sir Charles Wyndham even ventured to have 'Saratoga' adapted into German by Paul Lindau, as 'Seine erste und einzige Liebe'; and he acted it in Berlin. Apparently this was the first time any play of American authorship had ever been performed in any other than the language in which it had been originally composed.

It was characteristic of Bronson Howard's conscientiousness that he was always most scru-

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pulous in declaring whatever indebtedness he might have to any predecessor. He printed on the program of 'Moorcroft' an acknowledgment that he had derived the suggestion for the play from a short-story by John Hay, altho what he had borrowed was so insignificant that Hay told me he would never have suspected his own share in the work if Bronson Howard had not called attention to it. In like manner he set forth on the playbill of the 'Henrietta' the fact that one episode had its origin in a chapter of 'Vanity Fair.' In a speech before the curtain, on the hundredth performance of the 'Banker's Daughter,' he took occasion publicly to thank the late A. R. Cazauran for helping him to get into its final shape one of the important acts, assistance for which the author had already liberally paid.

When he was engaged in the composition of 'Peter Stuyvesant,' he declared to the friend with whom he was collaborating the principle on which he had always acted. He said that while an author was at work his whole duty was to the play he was engaged on, and he ought to use in its construction unhesitatingly whatever material it might need. Then, when the play was completed the artist had a duty as an honest man to look over his work and to decide whether it contained anything that really be-

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longed to any one else, living or dead, native or foreign. If the original owner was alive, his permission must be had; and this must be paid for, if necessary. And in any event, complete acknowledgment must be made, so that the author might not seem to be deckt with borrowed plumes. Here he laid down the law for every dramatist with an acute conscience. Bronson Howard himself was incapable of accepting the custom which obtained in England half-a-century ago, and which allowed the announcement of the 'Ticket-of-Leave Man' as a "new play by Tom Taylor," when this new play was in fact only an adaptation of the 'Léonard' of Brisebarre and Nus. There is absolutely no foundation for the malevolent insinuation, recently revived, that the plot of 'Saratoga' had been borrowed from some unidentified French piece. But, of course, Bronson Howard, like every other dramatist, living or dead, used unhesitatingly the situations which are the common property of all who write for the theater.

Bronson Howard's career as a dramatist covered the transition period of the modern drama, when it was changing from the platform-stage to the picture-frame stage. His immediate predecessor, Dion Boucicault, workt in accordance with the conditions of the platform-stage with its rhetori-

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cal emphasis, its confidential soliloquies to the audience, and its frequent changes of scene in the course of an act. 'London Assurance,' for example, is built absolutely upon the model of the 'School for Scandal'; and both comedies, Boucicault's as well as Sheridan's, have to be rearranged to adjust them to the theater of today, with its box-sets and with its curtain close to the footlights. When Bronson Howard began to write for the stage he accepted the convenient traditions of the time, altho he followed T. W. Robertson in giving only a single set to each act. As a result of this utilization of conventions soon to seem outworn, certain of his earlier plays appeared to him late in life impossible to bring down to date, as they had been composed in accordance with a method now discarded. This disadvantage is possibly only temporary; and even if these pieces strike us now as a little out of fashion, in time they may come to take on the quaint charm of the old-fashioned.

He moved with his time; and his latest plays, 'Aristocracy' for one and 'Kate' for another, are in accord with the more modern formula. Yet he did not go as far as some other playwrights of today. He knew that the art of the theater, like every other art, can live only by the conventions which allow it to depart from the mere facts of life; and he was unwilling to relinquish

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the soliloquy, for instance, which is often not only serviceable but actually necessary. He once said, half jokingly, to his collaborator in 'Peter Stuyvesant,' that if he had happened to write a play without a single soliloquy, he would be tempted to insert one, simply to retain the right to employ it when it was required. It may be noted, however, that he did not carry this out, since his last comedy, 'Kate,' is free from any soliloquy. He followed with unfailing sympathy and with unflagging interest the rejuvenation of the drama toward the end of the nineteenth century. He had no liking for Ibsen's attitude toward life, but he had the keenest appreciation of Ibsen's masterly technic.

His first successful piece was 'Saratoga,' which, altho announced by Augustin Daly, the manager who produced it, as a "comedy of contemporaneous manners," was in fact only a farce, wholly unrelated to contemporaneous manners or even to real life. Like most other playwrights, Howard began unambitiously and unpretendingly, desirous of composing the kind of play likely to please the audiences of his own day, the kind of play they were accustomed to relish. 'Saratoga' owed its popularity to the brisk ingenuity of its intrigue, to the unflagging vivacity of its adroit situations, and to the humorous felicity of its dialog. Its characters were little

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more than the traditional figures of farce; and one of its episodes set forth the sending of a series of challenges to a duel—a convenient theatrical tradition not even then justified by the customs of society. Inexpensive devices of this sort the author eschewed altogether as he grew in experience and as his observation became keener. But 'Saratoga,' arbitrary as it is in conception, in its characters, and in the conduct of its plot, deserved its popularity. Perhaps it might amuse even today, if it were presented, not as a "comedy of contemporaneous manners," but as a specimen of the farce of our fathers, with the costumes of 1870.

As he gained in technical skill, Howard's ambition developed, and his next play, 'Diamonds' (which was also produced at Daly's Theater), was really a "comedy of contemporaneous manners," altho it did not quite answer to its author's hopes. Slowly his insight into social conditions became clearer; and yet even the 'Banker's Daughter' has at the core of it the heroine's marriage with a man she does not love —a self-sacrifice which might be termed almost immoral and which the author never would have approved a few years later. Perhaps he first attained his larger ambition in 'Young Mrs. Winthrop,'—to satisfy it more completely in the 'Henrietta,' which remains to-day his most

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solid piece of work. Here, indeed, in contradiction to the generally accepted theory that the novel is constantly in advance of the drama in its investigation into society, the dramatist presented a picture of American life and character sharper in outline than any which had then been achieved by any novelist, with the sole exception of the author of 'Silas Lapham.'

Different as these two plays are,—'Young Mrs. Winthrop,' a delicate comedy of manners and sentiment, and the 'Henrietta,' a bold and robust social drama,—they had a common origin in the author's observation of the society in which he lived. It was about at this point in his work that he confided to a friend his discovery that every country had one theme on which numberless plays might be written with a firm assurance that at least the subject itself would be welcome to the playgoers of that nation. "In France," he explained, "this perennial topic is marital infelicity; in England it is caste; and here in the United States it is business." It was business, in one or another of its ramifications, which he chose to put into the center of these two plays in which he has most completely exprest himself.

This understanding of the importance of business in American life, and this desire of his to show some of its perils to his fellow-citizens,

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may be taken as added evidence of his keen insight into conditions on this side of the Atlantic, and of his intense Americanism,—an Americanism which was cosmopolitan in its outlook and radically free from any spread-eagleism. He knew England well, and the English also; and he liked them. He had traveled widely, keeping his mind open as he went, so that he understood other peoples with a quicker sympathy than most Americans. But tho he might choose now and again to present international contrasts of character and to set Americans over against foreigners, sometimes even on foreign soil, it is on his own countrymen that he spends his full strength. His plays, all of them, from first to last, are essentially American in theme and in outlook.

It was in their content only that his comedies revealed the country of their birth. In their form, the later of them were in complete accord with the cosmopolitan standard accepted everywhere at the end of the nineteenth century, when the conditions of performance were identical thruout the world. One of the most interesting results of the comparative study of modern literature is the discovery that exactly the same formula may now be employed by authors of many different languages, each of whom is putting the full flavor of his native soil into works composed after a model which has international

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vogue. The 'Henrietta' of Bronson Howard is as vibratingly American in its flavor as the 'Robe Rouge' of M. Brieux is unmistakably French in color, and as the 'Heimat' of Herr Sudermann is emphatically German in tone; but in their form, in their structure, in their method of presenting their several stories, these plays are all closely alike. And it was Bronson Howard who, first of all American playwrights, attained to the compact simplicity and the straightforward directness which this new cosmopolitan formula demands.

Artists often do their best, more or less unconscious of their processes, working by native instinct, and incapable of formulating the principles they have obeyed. But there are a few of them, more intelligent it may be and more inquisitive, who are able to deduce from their own practice a body of doctrine for future guidance. This is what Bronson Howard did. He had workt out for himself the principles of the little understood art of dramaturgy. He had as clear insight into the inexorable limitations which govern the presentation of a play on the stage before a succession of audiences as Sarcey had, or the younger Dumas. What he did by intuition, he could justify by precept. He had thought his art thru and thru in all its manifold intricacies; and as a result he had penetrated to

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its comparatively few essential laws. He went behind the rough-and-ready rule-of-thumb dogmas of the practical stage-manager to lay firm hold on the permanant principles which underly them all. One of these stage sayings is the dictum that you must never keep a secret from the audience and never put the spectators on a false scent; and the reasons for these are self-evident. This rule is broken in 'Young Mrs. Winthrop,' where the author keeps concealed the real motives of the husband's repeated visits to the woman of whom the wife is jealous, and allows the spectators to put themselves on a false scent. Here Bronson Howard violated a stage-tradition; he transgrest the minor rule to abide by a major law, retaining the sympathy of the audience for the heroine when she left her husband's home, a sympathy which she would have lost if the spectators had themselves been aware that the husband's conduct was blameless.

Bronson Howard recognized fully that the drama is not wholly contained within the bounds of literature. Like every other true dramatist, past and present, he wanted his work to be judged in the theater, for which it was written, rather than in the library. His latest comedy, 'Kate,' was publisht only because it was not likely to be acted immediately, as it called for a cast of

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competent actors not easily obtainable now that the star-system has been reduced to the absurd.

In his conversation he liked to dwell on the resemblance between the art of the dramatist and the art of the architect, since the first duty in both is to consider the planning. Solidity of construction is as important to a play as it is to a house. And he held also that true literary merit was to be sought in integrity of workmanship and in veracity of character-drawing. He maintained that literature in the drama should not be external,—as so many merely literary critics, unfamiliar with the theater, seem to think,—but internal. It is not a matter of rhetoric applied on the outside, but a question of sincerity of purpose and honesty of presentation within the play itself. He never descended to decorate his dialog with pretty speeches, existing only for their own sake. He never enameled the talk of his characters with detachable witticisms, clever sayings, extracted from the note-book and as effective in one play as in another. His humorous touches were always the expression of character and situation. He had been greatly pleased with Mr. William Archer's keen remark that the good things in the dialog of one of his comedies had bloomed there naturally "like blossoms on a laburnum," and were not stuck on arbitrarily "like candles on a Christmas-tree."

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His characters say what they ought to say, and in so doing they reveal themselves. He never sacrificed to mere phrase-making; and yet he had a mastery of phrase and a certainty of stroke. If he refrained from decking his dialog with flowers of speech, it was not because he had no poetry in him, no invention, no imagination. Invention he had in abundance, and also not a little of the larger informing and interpreting imagination. There is pure poetry, for instance, but in action rather than in words, in the funeral scene of 'Shenandoah,' where the soldier father, all unknowing, walks reverently behind the body of his erring son, who has been redeemed by a heroic death,—a picture of unspoken pathos which must linger in the memories of all who ever beheld the play.

In dealing with American life in the drama, poetically and realistically, Bronson Howard was a pioneer; and every one who seeks to evaluate his work must keep in mind constantly the fact that it was done in a transition period. During his life he saw the theater in this country change with a swiftness he could not dare to hope for when he began to write for the stage; and no one was more influential than he in bringing about this transformation. Forty years ago the American theater was in a condition of colonial dependence upon the British theater, altho this

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was a period of blank emptiness in the British drama. While the novel was flourishing in England, and while Thackeray and Dickens and George Eliot were adorning prose-fiction, literature and the drama had been divorced. The English-speaking stage was then a hotbed of unhealthy unreality, since it was occupied by foreign plays, the plots of which had been violently wrenched into an external conformity with British propriety. Sardou's essentially Gallic 'Pattes de Mouches' and 'Nos Intimes' and 'Dora' were made over into British plays, tainted with incurable falsity to the facts of life. Nowadays a French drama is translated only, and it remains French in character; but forty years ago, or even thirty, it was arbitrarily transmogrified into a bastard British drama.

And these British perversions of French pieces were then the staple of the American stage. The case would have been sad enough if our theaters had been given over solely to reproductions of British society, so different from our own in its ideals; but it was infinitely worse when our stage was filled with nondescript pieces which misrepresented British society. The American managers were not to blame for this, since there were then no American playwrights; and they were excusable if they insisted on the London hall-mark. Augustin Daly first, and secondly

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A. M. Palmer, began to import the Parisian successes direct, presenting them frankly in translation; and they sought diligently for original American plays. This policy left Lester Wallack sadly at sea, accustomed as he had been to follow blindly in the footsteps of our British cousins; and Wallack's had been for years the leading theater of the leading American city. I recall Wallack's plaintive tone when he said to me thirty years ago, "I used to get along very well, with the latest London success and a new play now and then by Dion or by John"—Boucicault and Brougham—"and an old comedy or two. But now, I really don't know what they want!" The British tradition seemed so natural to Lester Wallack, so inevitable, that when Bronson Howard, in his 'prentice days, took him a piece called 'Drum-Taps,'—which was to supply more than one comedy-scene to the later 'Shenandoah,'—the New York manager did not dare to risk a play on so American a theme as the Civil War. He returned it to the young author, saying, "Could n't you make it the Crimea?" But even the hunger of a young dramatist to have a play performed could not tempt Bronson Howard to deprive his work of all its significance.

Other managers there were who had more courage; and in time Bronson Howard got his chance and proved himself, and opened the way

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for the younger men who have come after him. Whether his plays will long survive him, time alone can tell. Perhaps the 'Henrietta,' with its virility, its hearty humor, and its ingenuity of stagecraft, will last longest. Perhaps his only one-act comedy, the delicate and delightful 'Old Love-Letters,' will prove more tempting to the next generation. Perhaps his last comedy, 'Kate,' when we see it on the stage, will turn out to be his masterpiece. But whatever the fate of his plays in the future, the place that Bronson Howard will hold in the history of the American drama is secure; and secure also is his place in the memory of all who had the good fortune to possess his friendship.

(1908.)

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